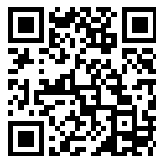

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

GoogleTM books

<https://books.google.com>





ARMOURD R. SCOUTS: Captain Brereton



ANNEX LIB.

Library of



Princeton University.

Pitney Fund
European War.

The Armoured-car Scouts

STORIES OF WAR

BY CAPTAIN BRERETON

"When Captain Brereton has a war subject to handle he always does it well."—*Westminster Gazette*.

On the Road to Bagdad: A Story of the British Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia.

With Our Russian Allies: A Tale of Cossack Fighting in the Eastern Campaign.

On the Field of Waterloo.

With Wellington in Spain: A Story of the Peninsula.

A Hero of Sedan: A Tale of the Franco-Prussian War.

With Wolseley to Kumasi: The First Ashanti War.

At Grips with the Turk: A Story of the Dardanelles Campaign.

With Roberts to Candahar: Third Afghan War.

A Hero of Lucknow: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny.

With Joffre at Verdun: A Story of the Western Front.

Under French's Command: A Story of the Western Front from Neuve Chapelle to Loos.

With French at the Front: A Story of the Great European War down to the Battle of the Aisne.

How Canada was Won: A Tale of Wolfe and Quebec.

Jones of the 64th. Battles of Assaye and Laswaree.

A Soldier of Japan: A Tale of the Russo-Japanese War.

With Shield and Assegai: A Tale of the Zulu War.

Under the Spangled Banner: The Spanish-American War.

In the King's Service: Cromwell's Invasion of Ireland.

In the Grip of the Mullah: Adventure in Somaliland.

With Rifle and Bayonet: A Story of the Boer War.

One of the Fighting Scouts: Guerrilla Warfare in South Africa.

The Dragon of Peking: A Story of the Boxer Revolt.

A Gallant Grenadier: A Story of the Crimean War.

LONDON: BLACKIE & SON, LTD., 50 OLD BAILEY, E.C.



C 886

"GUY GOT INTO DIFFICULTIES TOWARDS THE BOTTOM."

The Armoured-car Scouts

A Tale of the Campaign
in the Caucasus

BY
CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

Author of "On the Road to Bagdad"
"With Joffre at Verdun"
"With French at the Front"
&c. &c.

Illustrated by Arch. Webb

UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
PERKINSON

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY
1918

(RECAP)

3638

.77

.312

YT128EVINU

YRABLI

U.S. 90730894

Contents

CHAP.		Page
I.	JO CREEDY - - - - -	9
II.	INTRODUCING GUY GRAMMOND - - - - -	22
III.	THE WAY OF THE HUN - - - - -	45
IV.	ON OUTPOST DUTY - - - - -	67
V.	A HOT CORNER - - - - -	86
VI.	ATTACKED BY KURDISH HORSEMEN - - - - -	104
VII.	BEHIND THE TURKISH LINES - - - - -	125
VIII.	THE BARBAROUS TURK - - - - -	141
IX.	AIDING THE DEFENCELESS - - - - -	163
X.	DEFENDING THE FORT - - - - -	183
XI.	GUY, JO, and NICHOLAS - - - - -	202
XII.	A STERN CHASE - - - - -	223
XIII.	CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY - - - - -	238
XIV.	A FATEFUL MEETING - - - - -	256
XV.	THE NAVAL ARMoured-CAR DETACHMENT - - - - -	272
XVI.	AT EARLY SUNRISE - - - - -	292
XVII.	A CRUEL DISAPPOINTMENT - - - - -	310
XVIII.	SEEKING IN THE DARK - - - - -	332
XIX.	A NAVAL LAND BATTLE - - - - -	351
XX.	ERNST BLOTT - - - - -	370

Illustrations

	Page
"GUY GOT INTO DIFFICULTIES TOWARDS THE BOTTOM"	
<i>Frontispiece</i>	99
"'Hi!' YELLED GUY. 'HELP! SAVE US!'" - - -	38
"JO TOOK AIM AND SENT THE MAN ROLLING OUT OF THE SADDLE" - - - - -	187
"JO SMOTE HIM HEAVILY IN TRULY NAUTICAL FASHION" -	238
"ERNST BLOTT SNEERED AT THE FIGURE AND PUSHED THE LANTERN FARTHER FORWARD" - - - - -	320
"THE MACHINE-GUN MEN ON THE CAR GOT BUSY" - -	368

SKETCH MAP SHOWING THE POSITIONS OF VARIOUS ALLIED FORCES IN THE EAST - - - - -	178
--	-----

THE ARMOURED-CAR SCOUTS

CHAPTER I

Jo Creedy

GOODNESS only knows why Henry Godolphin MacGilpin Marmaduke Creedy ever joined His Majesty's Royal Navy, let alone how it was that he became part and parcel—and a very big and important part and parcel, let us add—of that armoured-car detachment which sped along the high roads one autumn evening *en route* for Russian territory.

Henry Godolphin MacGilpin Marmaduke Creedy! A regular mouthful!

“A regular eye-opener! What?” Henry was in the habit of exclaiming when remarks, complimentary or otherwise, were passed upon the string of names with which he had become endowed. “How did I get 'em? Why, now, sir, that's easy's anything to explain,” and at once the weather-beaten, crinkled, and

deeply lined face of this mariner took on a broad grin, while a knowing wink—yes, a knowing wink, in spite of the fact that the eyes of the officer who addressed him were upon him—also asserted itself. “Henry’s me pet name, sir; Godolphin, MacGilpin, and all the rest of ’em’s just family names like—names what me pa and ma took a fancy to. Couldn’t say for certain, sir, but me father was just plain John Creedy, and me mother just Mary. Seems they was disappointed to have so few names to sling about, and when I come on the scene—as fine and fat and plump a youngster as you could look for—why, they give me that mouthful.”

Officer or no officer, the hilarious, unquenchable Henry would then go off into a fit of laughter—laughter so infectious, and made so much more so by that seamed and lined and jovial face of his, that not even the surliest of officers, not one who had been on watch even for hours at a stretch, and who was utterly tired and cranky, could fail to respond, could arrest, once he had glanced down at that curious visage, the grin which began to stretch his own features, and which soon developed into a wide hearty laugh. To see Henry Creedy—Jo, people had somehow got to call him, as Jo, indeed, he had become known throughout the service—to see Jo, this somewhat short, broad-shouldered, heavily built, and stumpy sailor aboard one of His Majesty’s ships, was a sight not easily

forgotten. He had a roll all his own, a queer way of shuffling along the decks, where he balanced himself, with hands deep in his pockets, however much the boat was rolling.

And now, aboard this armoured car—or rather aboard the tender which followed one of these curious devices—Jo stood, legs apart, his nose just on a level with the canvas wind-screen, his cap cocked at an angle—a rakish look about him altogether—and his eyes, peering over the top of the canvas, just as they were wont to peer over the canvas edging of the bridge of a ship on the ocean.

“Right, right! Take the road to the right!” shouted an officer who came thundering up beside the cavalcade of cars on a motor-bicycle; and, repeating the order, Jo put one hand to his mouth and bellowed his hardest:

“Starboard—starboard, there!” and then, hearing a further order, shouted to the driver to pull up. “Stop her! Let go your anchor! Now we’ll pipe down to a meal.”

They were a jolly party, the men who manned this armoured-car detachment; drivers, artificers, machine-gunners, petty officers, officers, they were just one big, happy family. Covered with dust from head to foot after their run along the roads of Old England, thirsty and hungry and ready for a meal, and chattering whenever they had the opportunity,

chattering eagerly, and wondering what was before them.

Just about the same moment that the detachment swung down the streets of a certain thriving seaport town, and drew up on the quay ready for embarkation, a man—a tall, gaunt, bony individual, dressed in clothes which seemed too small for him and wearing a crushed hat upon his head—emerged from the door of a house of some pretensions in a certain city in Russia, and, peering to right and left and in front of him, and yet not furtively—it seemed as if, indeed, he had no fear of anyone—pulled the door to behind him and gently locked it. It was almost dark then, though the faint light there was seemed to concentrate itself about this individual—to fall upon him with a purpose—so that had one cared to look in his direction it would have been seen that this tall, gaunt individual was possessed of a face even less prepossessing than was his clothing. A pair of fierce moustaches sprouted out from either side of his cheeks, and were swept away from his upper lip, so that it and the mouth below it were fairly visible—a straight-cut, hard, and somewhat cruel mouth, the corners of which drooped in a manner which gave the man the appearance sometimes of a craven who is whimpering, an appearance rather added to than otherwise by the weak chin beneath. The nose and the eyes were perhaps the

most striking part of this individual's features, and the forehead, like the chin, displayed weakness, was narrow, and rather gave the impression of a man who was cunning and deceitful. And those eyes! How they flittered from side to side, and looked furtively across the street and up and down it.

Yes, now that the fading light seemed to have strangely concentrated upon this man, it could be seen that he was glancing fearfully from side to side, as if he feared detection. Then, seeing no one about, hearing nothing, he bent and peered through the key-hole of the door which he had just closed.

"Good! That's done it! The end of the infernal place! Blazing! Well lighted——!"

Suddenly he struck one side pocket with his hand, and, thrusting his fingers into it, jingled money; yes, coins, for their tinkling could be heard at quite a distance.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, his moustaches twitching; "that was good! That was clever! It seems to me that I must have thought of everything; and to-morrow, when the place is burnt out, and they find him, there will be no trace of what has happened. Good! It's time to be going. I'm really an awfully clever fellow!"

He grimaced and sniggered in the direction of the closed door, and then, turning abruptly, went off down the street with rapid strides which quickly took

14 The Armoured-car Scouts

him into the darkness. Behind him he left that somewhat pretentious house to all appearances normal—that is to say, the exterior of it presented nothing unusual compared with the exterior of fifty or more closely adjacent.

But wait! Within the place, within the four walls from which this tall, gaunt, sneaking individual had just departed, a seething, fiery furnace was enclosed—a furnace which grew in fury every moment, and which presently, breaking its bonds asunder as it were, eating its remorseless way through the flooring, sent flames blazing up to the higher stories, and finally sparks and flames and volumes of smoke out towards the stars. There were shouts then; a boy, seeing sparks emerge from the roof of the place, went howling along the street shouting the alarm; a bell clanged near at hand; and soon voices could be heard in all directions. By the time the brigade arrived the premises and those adjacent to them were blazing furiously; and, just as that gaunt individual had surmised, on the following day, when the heat had subsided a little, and a closer inspection was possible, but little was found of the interior, little, indeed, of the late owner of the place save the charred, mummied remains of a man tumbled in the basement.

“The Englishman!” the police officer said, giving vent to a guttural exclamation. “Choked by smoke. Eh?”

"Certainly," the head of the fire-brigade answered; "choked by smoke! Choked in his sleep, and then burnt to a cinder. And the other?" he asked.

"The other," cried the police officer, a huge man himself, a magnificent specimen amongst many fine men of Russian birth. "That German!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, yes! The German! What of him, then?" demanded the other.

"Nothing, or, rather, less than nothing. He'd friends—good friends—somewhere in this country; though how it happened that a German—an alien—could have been allowed to remain so long amongst us is beyond my comprehension. He had been in Russia for years, he'd married a Russian woman, and according to his own tale he was far more Russian than German. But he went almost two weeks ago—that's what his wife told me."

"Hum! Two weeks ago!" said the fire-brigade official, still bending over the remains of the unfortunate Englishman, now tumbled in the basement. "They were good friends, the two—eh? The two partners—Englishman and German! You wouldn't for an instant suggest, I suppose, my dear comrade, that the German had some grudge against his partner? You know that fires occur in the most extraordinary manner. This one, for instance. Well, now, what's the cause? You've discovered it?"

16 The Armoured-car Scouts

The police official looked at him wide-eyed for a moment, and then smiled a bantering smile.

"Discovered the cause of the fire, my dear fellow? Why, I'm a police official, and discovering the cause of a fire is your business. But surely you've no suspicion?"

"Every suspicion," the other answered. "See here, look in this corner—a tin of kerosene which has escaped the flames, though in my opinion the contents were spread on every side so as to make the flames take hold quickly. A tin of kerosene, my friend. Suspicious—eh? And supposing such suspicions are justified—supposing that German hound set fire to the building—what's his motive? What's he trying to gain? Why didn't he warn the Englishman? Why——?"

"The hound! You don't mean to tell me!" exploded the big Russian police officer, his face flaming with indignation and anger—for this simple-hearted giant could hardly conceive of such an act himself. Deliberate arson, after all, even with his long acquaintance with criminals of every variety, was not common in Russia; and, even if it were, the deliberate burning of a comrade was an unheard-of piece of rascality.

"Wait! I do not say the German has actually set fire to the place, but I ask you to consider the question," grinned the chief of the fire-brigade, rather

(C 886)

amused at the sudden boiling up of his friend's indignation. "I asked for a motive. Now, why should this German——?"

"Hound! Beast! Traitor! Brute!" the soft-eyed giant of a police officer answered, with even more heat than before.

"Certainly—all that and a little more. We've been at war with the Kaiser's people long enough to know that you may heap opprobrium on them and yet have done them no injustice; 'brute', everything you like, but where's his motive? Our friend, the Englishman, lies here charred to a cinder. Now, consider that kerosene can yonder in the corner, and then—— Ah, that's lucky! Here's our friend, the police medical officer. Barin, be good enough to examine all that's left of this poor fellow."

A lean, wiry, and diminutive little man, wearing a grey beard and big glasses, came stumbling over the debris which now was heaped everywhere within the cracked walls of that building from which the German had departed so secretly on the previous evening. He had a studious face, this Russian doctor, and seemed to take in the situation after a few rapid glances about him.

"Not all fair play—eh?" he asked the police officer abruptly. "What's that kerosene can doing in the corner?" And then, before the officer could reply, he asked another question. "What were you discussing?"

18 The Armoured-car Scouts

Do you suggest foul play? They tell me that a German and an Englishman owned this place—partners in some sort of business.”

By then he was bending over the charred remains of the man who, with the German, had owned the wrecked premises, and for a while the two officers—he of the police and his friend of the fire-brigade—watched curiously and with much interest as the doctor handled the gruesome object. There was excitement shown on their faces when, a minute or so later, the doctor called their attention to various signs which he had discovered, and, rising to his feet, shrugged his shoulders in Gallic manner and nodded at them.

“Dead, certainly, our friend the Englishman,” he said, “scorched and burned almost to a cinder, yet not killed by the fire. Oh dear, no, my friends! Killed by a knife thrust. You see the place; there can be no doubt whatever about it. So—so—that German——”

“Hound!” burst in the police officer. “He lit the fire to cover his tracks, to smother all trace of the murder, and the motive—of course he will have robbed the Englishman having once killed him, and by now no doubt is out of the country.”

When all the circumstances of the case came to be considered, when the evidence had been thoroughly sifted, and when information brought from people in

the city came to the ears of the police, there could be no doubt that that tall, gaunt, ungainly, ill-dressed German, who had left the premises that late evening, who had stooped to peer through the keyhole, and who had jingled money in his pockets, was indeed a murderer; nor any doubt that he had, for the moment at least, secured his safety by fleeing the country. That last fact established, there seemed little need to investigate matters further, for nothing could be done whilst this huge European war was raging, whilst Russia was calling millions of men to the colours, and whilst the fortunes of the country hung in the balance.

Yet, if the police, the men of the fire-brigade, and even that lean, alert little doctor dismissed the circumstances of this sordid tragedy from their minds within a few days of the event, there was one at least who never forgot it. This was a young, jovial, well-built fellow who stepped from a train about a week later, and, striding through the city from the railway station, directed his steps to the burnt-down premises.

He was Guy Grammond, son and heir of the Englishman whose charred remains had already been buried. Guy Grammond, as typical an English youth as you could discover in a long march through England, and yet, such a transformation do clothes and surroundings create, as typical and as fine a young Russian as this city could boast. Let us be brief in

describing Guy. He was tall for his age—which was two months short of eighteen—broad-shouldered, and deep-chested, yet rather lightly built about the hips, though that was a matter which rapid growth would quickly repair and alter. For the rest, he presented as frank and as fair a face as any proud mother could desire; yet, more the pity, Guy could boast of no mother, for she had predeceased his father by a couple of years. The lad was indeed now an orphan, almost a penniless orphan too.

“What will you do? Take a job somewhere?” one of his young Russian friends asked him—and let us explain that the tongue of these Slavs came as naturally to our young hero as did the English language. “Or—I say, Guy, that would be fine, wouldn’t it?—supposing you joined the Russian army?”

For a while Guy considered the question, for, to be perfectly truthful about the lad, he was still rather in a state of bewilderment: that fire, the bitter discovery he had made on his return from the country, the sudden and unexpected loss of his sole surviving parent, and the feeling of utter helplessness which had followed had rather floored him. He wanted yet some few days in which to recover, and perhaps, had he had plenty of money to jingle in his pockets, had that rascally German not only robbed his father of life but swept every penny from the premises, Guy might have remained some weeks in the place still without coming

to any decision. But when pockets are empty and appetites are healthy, when a war rages which demands the energy of all young men, whether Russian or British, then there is a stimulus to promote decision; and Guy, feeling that stimulus, gave a few minutes' consideration to the question, and then blurted out his answer:

“If I was a Russian I'd join your army to-morrow,” he told his friend; “but I'm British first, British all the time, and, well, don't you know, a fellow likes to fight with his own people. I'll go to England at once. Perhaps you and I will meet one day when the Russian and British armies get together.”

CHAPTER II

Introducing Guy Grammond

“So you’ll go to England—eh? And join up with the British army? Good! no, bad! I’m sorry—awfully!” Nicholas, Guy’s Russian chum, told him when he heard this young Englishman declare that he would return to his own country. “There’s nothing I would have liked better than for you to have enlisted as a Russian soldier, or, even better still, to have obtained a commission. Think it over again, Guy. I shall be eighteen in less than a week, and you in a couple of months; then I shall be called up for the army, and have already been promised a commission. Why not come with me?”

Guy thought for a while, standing there on the pavement outside the wrecked premises set fire to by that rascally German, his forehead seamed and lined rather heavily for a youth of his age as he considered this momentous question; then he shook his head and smiled at his friend.

“Can’t be done, Nicholas,” he said, a little abruptly; “wish it could, don’t you know. But there are more

reasons than one for my wanting to return to England. First and foremost, of course, I want to fight these Germans."

"Of course; what then?"

"Then there are my people."

"Your people?" enquired Nicholas politely. "I—— Well——but there——"

He was about to ask a question, and then, with true Russian politeness, realizing that it might appear inquisitive—and inquisitiveness in the case of his chum's private affairs was a thing that Nicholas would not dream of—he suddenly arrested his speech and remained standing on the curb, looking a little anxiously at Guy, who promptly reassured him.

"Didn't know I had any people—eh?" he smiled. "Nor did I till a couple of months or more ago. You see, my father was always a quiet, reserved sort of fellow, though always wonderfully good to me. There was some sort of a mystery about his marriage with my mother, and though he told me something it was but the bare fringe of the story. He merely opened the cover of the book, you might say, and left me to delve further into the matter. Shortly put, he and my mother made a runaway match of it. She was well-connected, I understand, and came of high-placed, wealthy people, while my father was the younger son of people of no great consequence. The two classes

do not always mix happily when it comes to marriage—at least not in Old England.”

“Nor here, Guy, nor here,” Nicholas assured him, listening sympathetically to a tale which his English chum had never ventured even to mention previously. “So there was a runaway match—eh? and she, that is your mother, Guy, had wealthy parents.”

“Yes! The marriage was strongly opposed; my mother, I believe, was banished, and in any case my father, having been offered work in Russia, where he already had business interests, brought her here, which cut both her and himself off from their own people. But it is a long tale, Nicholas, and when I want to go into it, why, there are my father’s papers, which lie in a box at the notary’s at the top of the street. So, to go on with what we were saying, I have another reason for going to England, and if I can screw up my courage I will hunt out these people. As for the commission in the Russian army, don’t I wish I could accept it; but, as I said, let’s hope we shall tumble up against one another—less likely things will happen in this gigantic war that’s raging.”

The two walked up and down the street for a while discussing various matters, and then Nicholas, all of a sudden, raised a question which had not occurred to either of them earlier. Guy had asserted his intention of making for his native country, and had quite forgotten to consider the ways and means of arriving at

Introducing Guy Grammond 25

the end of his journey; while Nicholas, knowing his British chum so well, having some considerable opinion of his prowess, and well aware that he was a youth with no small stock of dash and energy and assurance, took it for granted that what Guy said he would do he would most certainly accomplish.

“But—but——” began Nicholas, his jaw suddenly dropping, though to be sure, when he thought about the matter, he would have been only too delighted if the difficulties he now put before his friend caused him to abandon the attempt. “But, Guy,” he stuttered, “go to England! Can’t be done, my friend! Consider for a little while; we are at war; the express to Warsaw no longer runs, for Warsaw is now German.”

“German!” exclaimed Guy, and then, suddenly recollecting that during the late summer of this year Germany had indeed captured that city, he growled, or rather gave vent to a grumbling exclamation.

Not, indeed, that he had forgotten that event—for how could anyone in Russia forget the terrific contest that had raged so recently? Let us briefly, and for the moment, outline the course of events in Holy Russia since that fatal and fateful day when the Kaiser and his war lords had cast down the mailed gauntlet, which they had been brandishing for so many years in the eyes of Europe, at the feet of the Muscovite population. That declaration of war had

found Russia only partially ready for a conflict of ordinary dimensions. She was then, and has been since the Russo-Japanese War, actively engaged in reorganizing and re-equipping her armies, and though the process of equipment had gone apace, and many improvements had been effected, yet the scheme in its entirety was not yet complete, and indeed was far from it. Even for a conflict of the dimensions of others that had gone before it, her preparations were not yet what they should be. And now this war, this Armageddon, following the boastful declaration on the part of the Kaiser, was destined—everyone could see that at the very commencement, for were not Germany and Austria-Hungary united together, and were not France, Great Britain, Serbia, and many another nation already dragged in on the opposing side, or to be dragged in with Russia—was destined to develop into a conflict of unprecedented and unparalleled importance; a mighty struggle, a struggle, indeed, for liberty and freedom on the part of Russia and her allies, a deadly struggle against the ambitious designs of Germany and of her arrogant Kaiser. Yes, for years and years, ever since the Confederation of German States had been brought about during the war with France in 1870, the Kaiser and his people had set themselves to work to prepare for this same Armageddon, for that conflict which, thanks to their enterprise, to their continuous training and preparation,

and, let us add, to their unscrupulous behaviour on many an occasion, promised to make them lords of the world—the arbiters of the destinies of all nations. The hour had struck! The day had come! The day had come and found Russia, as we have said already, only partially prepared, her organization not yet completed, and, perhaps more important and more unfortunate than all for her, her means of transport disastrously unfinished.

Bear in mind that Russia is a country of vast spaces, and that her hundred-and-seventy millions of people are scattered broadcast, in some cases severed from their compatriots by hopeless distances, distances made all the greater by the fact that for six months alone is travelling by road and rail and river possible; for the remainder of the time, snow and blizzards and rain and mud make journeying impossible and out of the question. Yet railroads can be built to overcome such difficulties; and railroads, had Russia possessed them, leading from the heart of the country towards her frontiers, would have been of incalculable assistance to her in this mighty conflict. Germany had them; for years she had been building a network of iron tracks from every part of her provinces to the Polish frontier, so that when this hour struck she could throw troops by the thousand in any direction. That, then, was one of the difficulties which faced the Russian people at the outbreak of this conflict.

There was another one of vital importance, one not altogether foreign to Great Britain. To fight a nation such as Germany, men by the hundred thousand are required; but men alone are useless—guns, rifles, implements of warfare, and, above all, munitions in unlimited quantities are necessary, and Russia, only half prepared, was, even at the commencement of the conflict, not too well provided. Yet she had sufficient to enable her to open the war on her side in the most victorious fashion. Her hordes swept over the Galician frontier to Lemberg and Przemyśl, while her Cossacks rode through the Carpathian passes. True, in Eastern Prussia she met with a serious reverse; but, taken altogether, the end of 1914, and the earlier months of 1915, found her victorious to a certain point, but found her also short of ammunition.

Such a state of affairs could not remain unknown to Germany, possessed of a system of espionage better than has ever before existed. Freed from immediate anxiety in the west, for Britain was not yet ready, and had not yet mobilized those mighty armies which she now possesses, Germany turned with all her effective forces against the Russians, and, finding them short of munitions, as we have said, beat them back, blew them, literally, from the mouths of her massed cannon, forced them out of Poland and Galicia, and finally won her way into Russia, and so to Warsaw. Nicholas was therefore right when he said that no

Introducing Guy Grammond 29

express could bear Guy Grammond to that historic city.

“It can't be done, my boy. The good old days have gone, though I for one am not pessimist enough to imagine that they have departed for ever. After all, when you come to think of it, it's not so very wonderful that Germany, with all her secret preparations, with the huge expenditure she has allowed for munitions and for the organization of her armies, should find her neighbours—neighbours, mind you, lacking the extraordinary ambitions she possesses—should find them short of many of the necessities to carry out successful warfare. I'll grant you,” said Nicholas, a little grudgingly it is true, for it made this intensely patriotic young Russian squirm when he remembered the events which had so recently happened—“I'll grant you that the best of the game so far has gone to Germany and Austria; they have snatched from us what we won in 1914 and early 1915; they have taken Poland altogether, and now hold quite a nice little slice of our Fatherland. But then, just to repeat what everyone is saying, Germany was ready to the last button on the last gaiter, or, seeing that Germans don't wear gaiters, let us say to the last rivet on the last helmet of her battalions. You wait a bit! Perhaps before long that Russian express, which we used to board in such a lordly manner, will run again and take us to the Russian city of Warsaw.”

"Nothing I'd like better!" Guy assented, sympathizing deeply with his friend. "I'm sure that, given time, Russia will pull herself together again. Japan is said to be pouring guns and shells into the country, and we all know that your allies outside Russia are doing their utmost to supply munitions. You've got the men, and you're training them, so it seems to me that time will certainly tell in your favour. But, Nicholas, my boy, though the Russian express will undoubtedly run to the Russian city of Warsaw one of these days, permit me to remind you that I require transport at the moment. I'm bound for England."

"Worse luck!" exclaimed Nicholas. "Well, now, how's it to be done? And, one moment, excuse my reminding you, but travelling requires money."

It does. Quite unconsciously Guy slapped each one of his many pockets, and thrust his hands deep into those of his trousers, finding, unfortunately, hardly two coins there to jingle together. Indeed, we do not overstate the case when we say that at the moment he was almost a pauper. That German had robbed him of every rouble, and though, when matters came to be cleared up, there might be a certain sum coming to him—for the site on which the ruined house stood was of value—still, if this young fellow were to rely upon it, he would never be a Croesus.

Introducing Guy Grammond 31

"Ah, money! That's a bore, Nicholas," he said. "But there's a consul—a British Consul—in this town, and I'll see what he can do for me."

Hardly a week later, armed with a warrant which allowed him to travel to Petrograd, and from that city to one of the Baltic ports, Guy bade farewell to his friend and boarded the train for his destination. A few days later he embarked upon a Swedish ferry-boat, and, crossing the eastern end of the Baltic, stepped ashore on neutral soil. At this point letters which he carried gave him an introduction to the British Consul, and, crossing the mainland of Sweden, he finally embarked again upon a vessel which was bound for England.

It was a cold, wintry day as the ship put off from the quay, and for a while Guy watched the shores of Sweden receding; then he plunged down below, and, having partaken of a meal, turned into the bunk which had been allotted to him. It seemed to him about an hour later, though in reality several hours had passed—for the dawn had just broken—when of a sudden he was awakened. There was a terrific explosion somewhere near at hand, and, opening his eyes, and glancing through the port-hole, he was just in time to observe a brilliant flash, which an instant later was overwhelmed, as it were submerged and drowned, by a mighty wave which swept up and over the deck of the vessel.

"A mine!" he thought. "That means that the vessel will have been holed. I'd better get on deck as quickly as possible."

He had thrown himself on to his bunk fully dressed; for, to tell the truth, Guy was not possessed of much apparel, and night-gear did not accompany him. In fact, his possessions were so limited that he owned only what he stood up in—that and a few shillings which the consul had advanced for his journey. Thus it followed that in a very short space of time he clambered to the deck, strapping on a life-belt as he went—for one reposed near his bunk. But, quick as he had been, and indeed only a few seconds had elapsed from the moment of his awakening to his arrival on the deck, the ship had already changed her position materially. The deck sloped steeply already, and clambering up the companion to it was a matter of great difficulty—not, however, of such great difficulty for an active young fellow like Guy, but certainly for aged people, for women and children. Here, in fact, Guy discovered one young woman unable to clamber up, and promptly gave her assistance. A minute later he needed some himself, for, without warning, the ship, which had rolled to starboard, suddenly rolled in the opposite direction, while her bows reared upwards with alarming suddenness, throwing him from the slope of the gangway to the bottom of the stairs, where his fall was broken by the

bodies of a number of passengers who had been flung down before him.

There were shouts in all directions now, while those unfortunate passengers upon whom he lay struggled to their feet, struggled and fought with one another, and, forgetting all else but the natural and unconquerable desire for self-preservation, clawed at one another and made frantic efforts to mount that companion-way and reach daylight. Beaten back, thrust and buffeted, and half-dazed from his sudden fall, and by the fact that his head had come into violent contact with the wall of the companion-way, Guy reeled into a corner—thrust there by one of the lustiest of those struggling passengers—and watched with half-observing eyes as that bitter, frightful struggle continued. Then the ship rolled again, and plunged her bows under the water, flinging the combatants into the opposite corner, where it would have deposited our hero too had he not clung to the gangway railing.

A glance now showed him the stairway not leading upwards as it was wont to do, but, owing to the abnormal position of the ship, inclining upward ever so gently. It was easy to mount, and pulling himself together, shaking the dizziness from his head, as it were, he rushed up to the deck as rapidly as his legs would take him, and then another lurch, another roll, a fretful shake from end to end of the ship, flung him across the slippery deck, where, encountering a spot

34 The Armoured-car Scouts

against which some heavy deck cargo which had broken loose had crashed some few seconds before, and where the bulwarks had been smashed to pieces, Guy shot out into space and went splashing into the water.

Striking out as he rose to the surface—his dizziness now gone entirely, thanks to this immersion in freezing water—Guy looked about him, we must confess, in the most bewildered manner, his pulses beating, every nerve in his body excited by this sudden and unexpected happening, and every ounce of his strength alert to meet the need which faced him, the call to struggle for his existence. The ship lay within three yards of him perhaps, wallowing, plunging this way and that, now dipping her nose deep in the water—for quite a moderate sea was running—and then tilting back till her bows were clear of the ocean, and spray and cascades of green water poured from her decks. There were figures clinging there too—helpless figures—while shouts and shrieks came from the vessel. There was also the clatter and clash of deck fittings, deck cargo, and boats, broken or breaking loose owing to the violent movements of the ship, scurrying this way and that, glissading across the slippery decks, cannoning against this object and that, and now and again, when heavy enough, bursting their way through the bulwarks.

It was a terrific spectacle, made all the worse when,

of a sudden, a more frantic jerk of the boat caused one of the masts to give way, a halyard having been cut adrift by a part of the plunging cargo. The huge steel beam cockled close to the deck, swayed for a moment, and then came down with the violence and the swiftness of a flail, crushing the bulwarks opposite, sweeping a dozen unfortunate sailors and passengers from its path, and then breaking off with the report of a cannon.

Something touched Guy's arm; something was swept against him by a wave—swept over him, in fact—pushing him under, and then an eager, clutching hand gripped at him. He turned with every impulse aroused to beat off this attack, to break away from this something, this unfortunate derelict, floating in the water like himself, lest it should prove an incubus and pull him under; and then, as another wave bore him upwards, and he floated, as it were, above the object which had struck him, he saw that it was the figure of a girl—a girl, too, whom he had noticed among the passengers, a girl perhaps no older than himself, her hat now gone, her face deathly pallid, her eyes closed, her hair floating out behind her. True, somehow, unintentionally no doubt, she had clutched spasmodically at him, yet ever so feebly, for the wash of the waves and his own impulsive movement had cast off her grip; but now she floated there, or rather lay in the water almost wholly submerged,

as helpless as a log, unconscious apparently, soon to be swallowed up by the ocean.

Guy shot out a hand—a helping hand—for who could resist the impulse?

“Got to be done!” he told himself; “though the water in one’s clothes weighs one down terribly. I’ll see what can be done. Wait! What’s that? A bit of one of the boats near enough to be handy.”

It was so close that whilst he tucked the girl’s head on one shoulder he could, by stretching out the other arm and kicking violently, reach the object which had now attracted his attention to find, as he had suspected, that it was indeed a portion of one of the boats, which had been crushed like an egg-shell by some heavy piece of cargo knocking against it. Holding on to it firmly, he found that, thanks to it and the life-belt which he had donned before he was cast out of the vessel, he was able to keep his head well out of the water, and that also of the girl he had dragged beside him.

“Ship won’t last long, I’m sure,” he told himself, having arranged matters to his satisfaction; that is to say, if a man—yes, for Guy was in his budding manhood now, and what man could have behaved more gallantly than he?—that is to say, if a man could discover anything approaching satisfaction in the midst of such terrible surroundings. “She’s going! Lor’! How she tilted that time!”

Introducing Guy Grammond 37

His eyes almost starting from their sockets, his heart beating faster than ever, he watched with horror as the ship, now drifted some sixty yards away, suddenly tossed her bows into the air more violently than before, and, as if the water she had taken aboard had rushed right aft with terrible impetus, bobbed deep down till her funnels were almost submerged. No doubt that weight of water plunging downhill in her hold had rebounded, for a moment later she popped up again, for all the world like a cork which had been suddenly thrown into the water, and, splashing and sousing forward once more, reached an even keel and retained it for perhaps a minute. Then quite slowly she tipped forward till her stern rose from the water, till her propeller was high in the air, and remained so for perhaps another minute—an eternity it seemed to Guy as he watched, long minutes of spun-out agony. Slowly she turned round as the currents played about her, till first one side of the stern was fully exposed, and then the decks—now cleared of everything and everyone, save one single individual who had lashed himself to the rails amidships, and hung there helpless, unconscious without a doubt, perhaps drowned already by the almost complete submergence of the vessel.

Then the scene changed once more as she slowly spun, till the farther side was exposed, and in it, a little aft of amidships, a gigantic chasm, a huge

38 The Armoured-car Scouts

rent in the iron plates, the edges of which were serrated, and through which water had swamped the holds.

So for that long minute, that eternity, she stood there, and then sank steadily down and disappeared for ever, bubbles of air boiling above the spot where the water had closed over her. Only then did Guy perceive another vessel. Turning swiftly, he became aware of the fact that an ugly grey ship had lifted from the surface within some twenty yards of him.

"A submarine!" he shouted. "Help! Take us aboard!"

Spume floated and blew from the smooth turret of that submarine, while for five minutes perhaps—another eternity—she lay there wallowing in the water, her conning-tower rising slowly till her decks began to get awash; then there was a loud metallic sound, followed by a movement on top of the conning-tower, by the opening of a hatchway, and by the appearance of a head—the head of an officer.

"German!" Guy stuttered. "Hi!" he yelled. "Help! Save us!"

As cold and as unsympathetic as the conning-tower from which he had risen, the face of this German was turned upon him, and for a while he and Guy looked critically at one another; then the man turned, swept his glasses to his eyes, and looked round the horizon. A minute later he bobbed down once more, the

hatchway was closed, and, as Guy stared and shouted desperately, the conning-tower sank from his view, and once again he was left—he and the girl he was supporting—alone, save for perhaps a dozen other individuals as unfortunate as themselves who floated in the neighbourhood.

It was there that the rescuers aboard a third vessel, espied by that German officer, found him perhaps twenty minutes later, cold and numbed, and almost as unconscious as his burden; and from that spot that stout fellow, Henry Godolphin MacGilpin Marmaduke Creedy—Jo, the healthy, jovial Jo—assisted to lift him when the boat into which he had sprung drew near enough.

“A gall!” he shouted as he relieved Guy of his burden. “Looks mighty bad, that’s all I can say! Who’s the fellow? Russian? Not he! Good, sound British, I should call him. And alive, too, for his eyes are open.”

“Alive!” Guy managed to gurgle—almost managed to shout, and, indeed, did his best to do so, for somehow or other the suggestion that he might be dead annoyed him considerably. “Just as alive as yourself. Who are you? Where are we? What’s happened? And where’s the girl I was supporting?”

“All in good time, young shaver! Just you shut

40 The Armoured-car Scouts

that mouth of yours, for you want all your strength for breathin'. The gal—eh? Now then, my boy, this ain't the time for axin' questions; just you get below and turn in for a spell."

How anyone was to "turn in" in that cockle-shell was a matter which even this gallant sailor, possessed of a mouthful of Christian names, would have found it difficult to explain to a novice; still, Jo seemed to have his own idea, for he pushed Guy gently enough into the stern-sheets of the boat, packed a blanket and then a tarpaulin about him, and, shaking a fist in his face and growling at him—yet in the most good-natured manner, for his face, what could be seen of it as the spray swept over the tiny cockle-shell, was seamed with smiles—turned to another bundle near at hand. It was the girl whom Guy had rescued, and whom Jo now supported, tucking her head on his shoulder, drawing blankets well round her, and shooting an anxious glance over his shoulder at the ship which he and his mates had left.

"You'll have to pull a good oar, there, my boys," he called to the men near him. "This ain't the time for lyin' out or sloppin' about in this sea, with spray comin' all aboard, to say nothin' of a gal 'ere who's more dead than alive. Put your hearts into it, my lads! Get home between decks as soon as possible."

"Look!" An officer at the tiller stood up, and,



C 886

“‘HI!’ YELLED GUY. ‘HELP! SAVE US!’”

holding to the gunwale, pointed away to his left. "Look!" he bawled again.

Aye! Look! Yonder a grey shape of indefinite form was rising slowly from the ocean, sending cascades of water pouring from its summit, whilst clouds of spume were caught by the wind and blown away across the water. It was the submarine again, that evil-looking object, poking its conning-tower up above the surface, and prying round as if in search of another victim. And then—boom! A gun was fired from the ship which Jo and this rescuing-party had left, a shell splashed the water quite close to them, and, ricochetting, shot directly over the conning-tower. A foot lower—less perhaps—and that shell would have struck the target, and there would have been one fewer of the Kaiser's submarines to haunt the seas and murder women and children. Yes, murder women and children in cold blood—murder the helpless, the least-resisting.

History will record one of these days in cold print, and in calm, terse sentences, how this huge European war, which now occupies the strenuous efforts of so many nations, was waged, not as other wars which have happened earlier. In almost every one of them chivalry has been displayed—men have fought and bled and died, have fought with bitterness and hatred, and yet, in their calmer moments—between the battles as it were—have realized that, whatever

injury the enemy may have done them, however much he was to be detested, he yet possessed good points, for had he not shown chivalry in this or that action? But Germans show chivalry in this gigantic conflict! Never! Never once, we trow! Little else, indeed, but ruthless violence—frightfulness to all-comers.

We state but actual facts when we remind the reader that, putting aside the dropping of bombs from Zeppelins and aeroplanes upon undefended places and upon non-combatants, it was the Kaiser and his war lords who first permitted submarines to torpedo passenger vessels, to send crews and passengers to their death, without warning and without assistance. Bear in mind that the *Lusitania*—that gigantic craft plying between America and England—was sent to her doom, with above one thousand helpless individuals, by the action of these monsters. And here again was another example—only one amongst large numbers—an example of the ruthlessness of an emperor and a nation who boasted aloud of their *Kultur*; not only boasted of it, indeed, but wished to implant that *Kultur* upon other nations, to force the whole world, in fact, to adopt it.

It is not our object to harp on the distasteful theme of German *Kultur*, but to record the doings of Guy Grammond, who was there in that open boat, lying at the feet of Jo, that humorous and somewhat ancient

mariner—Jo, who at that moment was shaking his fist at the fast disappearing submarine which had been the cause of Guy's undoing.

"Of all the swine!" he was shouting. "Of all the beasts that ever were! Of all the brutes that ever were! Bah! She's gone! Wish it had been to Davy Jones's locker."

Many a scowl was cast by the crew of this tiny boat in the direction where the German submarine had put in its second appearance; and then, at a call from the officer, they bent to their oars and pulled lustily for the vessel. Getting aboard her, and lifting the two survivors on to her deck, was no easy matter; yet at length it was accomplished, and perhaps half an hour later found Guy feeling far stronger, his knees shaking rather badly, it is true, but his strength fast returning. Stripped of his clothing, and wrapped in the warm folds of a blanket, he sat on a chair in front of the donkey-engine boiler down in the engine-room, while a huge bucket of steaming water was at his feet. There, imbibing the warmth, his condition improving every minute, he sat under Jo's critical eye and listened to the cheerful discourse of that garrulous gentleman.

"No—no! not half enough," Jo told him very severely, menacing him with an uplifted china tankard of steaming tea; "just you put your nose to the brim of that there pot, me boy. Smells good, don't it? And I'll whisper a secret; it's got just a suspicion—

44 The Armoured-car Scouts

only a suspicion—of rum in it, and rum's the stuff to bring a dead man back to his senses. Now, get rid of the lot—nippy does it!"

And nippy Guy had to be; feeling by the time he had swallowed that boiling mixture—what with the heat within and the heat without—like Vesuvius, or some other explosive mountain.

"And when you're more yourself again," said Jo, contemplating him a little less severely, "when your pins is strong and square once more, and ain't got that curious wobble in 'em, then we can get to and have a pow-wow, as those blessed oficers calls it—a pow-wow—bow-wow is what I calls it—a pow-wow—so as a fellow can learn where you come from, who you are, and where you're a-goin'."

CHAPTER III

The Way of the Hun

IF Guy had sat down in that engine-room, even supposing him to have been in the fittest of conditions, with the intention and honest endeavour to satisfy the curiosity of the garrulous and jovial Jo, he might well have found himself exhausted long before the "pow-wow", as Jo liked to call it, had come to an end. For Jo, without being indecently curious, was quite the most curious individual that Guy had ever met. However, seeing our hero's somewhat washed-out condition he was rather lenient, and, standing there in the full blaze of the heat of the donkey-engine boiler, his arms akimbo, his feet well separated, his cap at a rakish angle, he regarded his young charge, and for some few moments, as Guy pulled himself together, informed that young gentleman, and sundry within hearing, what his own particular sentiments were on the subject of Germans in general, of the Kaiser and his war lords in particular, and, more than all, of the commanders of German submarines who murdered women and children.

"Ha!" he grinned at length; "and now, young shaver, let's know all about it. You ain't Russian—that's as clear as daylight. I should set you down as British, and yet not British, 'cos you've got a sort of foreign cut about your hair—now that it's got dry. Yes," he went on, standing a little distance away and regarding his charge as he sat under the beams of an electric lamp, "you've got the colour of an Englishman—British ain't it?"

Guy nodded.

"Yes," he said a little lamely, for to tell the truth reaction was now telling upon him; he had a most unaccountable desire to sleep, and yawned loudly.

"Then why not Russian? Ho, ho! Sleepy—eh? Well, and no wonder; one of you mates there lend a hand; and, young shaver, we'll defer the pow-wow till to-morrow morning."

On the morrow, after a long and solid night's sleep, utterly undisturbed by the tossing of the vessel, Guy appeared on deck looking quite himself again, and yet not quite himself—if the contradiction may be allowed—seeing that his own clothing, having been soaked in the sea, had shrunk in the most scandalous manner.

"It stands to reason," said Jo, who seemed to have taken him under his special care and to pay him unwonted attention—"it stands to reason we can't have a young British chap turning out on deck like a scarecrow; why, bless my feet and hands! yer arms and

yer legs stick through them togs in a manner that would frighten old Neptune. Stand fast there a moment, and let's see what the mates can do."

He returned to the cabin, in which Guy had slept, with a bundle of clothing over his arm, and flung the garments down on the bunk.

"You get into these, young shaver; they'll fit you, I guess—for I've an eye for the size of a fellow. My word!" he exclaimed, some few minutes later, when our hero was fully rigged out, "and don't we just look the sailor all over?"

Indeed, the transformation made in Guy's appearance by clothing was really remarkable. We have said already that, dressed in the costume common to the people of the class he associated with in Russia, he had borne a most distinctly Muscovite appearance, altered only slightly by his fair, ruddy skin, as compared with the somewhat sallow complexion of the Russian; and now, in these nautical togs, in dark blue, his double-breasted coat fitting him quite nicely, and his peaked cap unconsciously at just a waggish angle, Guy did look quite the sailor—quite "it" as Jo promptly ventured to tell him.

"Well I'm just jiggered," he told our hero, standing back from him and grinning, his face seamed all over—that weather-beaten face which always looked so pleasant, so good-tempered—"if now you was to have just a stripe or two of lace on them sleeves, and

48 The Armoured-car Scouts

something on the front of that cap, why, there 'ud be no taking you for anything else but an orficer. Tell us, young——'ere, what's yer name——?"

"Guy."

"Ho! Guy! That sounds well. And, me lad, you speak like an orficer too. Father what?" asked the inquisitive Jo, quite unabashed.

Indeed, his inquisitiveness was not that of the ordinary man; it was just that of Jo, kindly Jo, eager to take upon himself the troubles of others, and anxious to lend a helping hand to all with whom he came in contact. This was Jo's reputation throughout the senior service; and the navy, having had ample time—for Jo was quite an old sailor—had weighed the man up, knew his worth, with sailor-like exactitude, to an ounce, and had long since voted Jo a nice, kindly, garrulous individual who masked a stolid, courageous soul under a jovial and flippant exterior. Nor was Guy slow to weigh this honest mariner who had already showed such friendship towards him.

"I'll tell you all about it," he said, as the two sat down to breakfast, "only it'll have to be a bargain: you'll have to tell me in turn who you are, why you're here, and what all these men are doing. I caught sight of a queer-looking vehicle down between decks just now; what on earth is it?"

"'Old 'ard! A bargain's a bargain. You tell me your yarn first," grinned Jo, "and then I'll follow

suit. Now then—your father? your mother? your sister? your brother?”

It was quite impossible, quite out of the question, to be offended with the friendly curiosity of this jovial mariner; and as Guy ate a very hearty breakfast—indeed, so hearty that it was impossible to realize that but a few hours before he had been on the point of drowning—he opened his heart to Jo, literally told him everything, and informed him of his penniless, and now somewhat precarious, condition.

“Precarious, which means bad, not good, a little worser,” reflected Jo, as he tilted himself back on the bench and began to fill a pipe which was as black as his boots and showed evidence of much use. “But you’re making a mistake, me lad, if by precarious you mean that you’ve got no job, no means of earning a livelihood, and what not. Ain’t you got yer health and yer strength—and ain’t yer British?”

“Right through!”

“Right through? Then ain’t there work for every British son amongst us? What’s on?” demanded Jo almost fiercely, and then smiled broadly at Guy as he pushed the stem of his pipe between his lips and into a convenient interval between his teeth. “What’s—on—me—lad? What’s—England—a-doin’? Ain’t—she—at—war?” he puffed, holding a match to the bowl of his pipe and peeping through the now thickening clouds of smoke at our hero. “Ain’t every
(0 889)

50 The Armoured-car Scouts

mother's son amongst us a-puttin' on his boots to kick that there Kaiser? And ain't you, me lad, got an extra thick-soled pair that'll help in the kickin'? Burr!" He blew out a stream of smoke, and treated Guy to a meaning flash.

"Just so," the latter answered in mollifying tones, for, not knowing this mariner intimately yet, he was not quite accustomed to Jo's moods and manners, and really thought that he was half angry. "I'm on my way home to put on that pair of boots," he said. "I've told you all about the fire in Russia, about that scoundrel of a German—Ernst Blott?—"

"Blott! What a name! Wait, though, I've got something for you. Listen to this for a mouthful," said Jo, expanding his chest and getting ready for an effort. "How's this for something grand and magnificent, befitting His Majesty's navy?—Henry Godolphin MacGilpin Marmaduke Creedy; that's me—otherwise Jo; but Blott! Blimey! Blott! I'd 'blott' the beggar if I was you when you catch him."

"Exactly so! I determined to do that long ago, and indeed must if I am to recover the money which the wretch stole from my father. But, to continue, I was on my way home to accept service in the British army."

"Army!" shouted Jo, spurting a fierce jet of smoke in Guy's direction, and glaring at him through it. "Army, me boy! Why army? One 'ud think, to

hear you talk, there wasn't such a thing as the navy—His Britannic Majesty's Royal Navy! What's wrong with the navy then—eh?"

It quite made Guy jump, so fierce was his demeanour, and for awhile the latter sat, his fork half-way between his plate and his mouth, a portion of grilled ham transfixed upon it, and one hand gripping the handle of his mug of tea as if he were holding to it for support, and as if he were flabbergasted. To speak the truth, he was quite taken aback; for, as we have said, he had not yet quite appreciated the curious moods of the man who sat opposite to him. Then Jo grinned—the seams in his weather-beaten face grew deeper, his lips parted, showing a row of irregular and tobacco-stained teeth, with a gap between two of them through which the stem of his pipe protruded. Then the teeth went apart, a stubby, blackened, and gnarled finger hooked the pipe round the stem and extricated it, and a moment later Jo had flung his head back and was laughing uproariously.

"Who's that? What's this noise about?"

A head was thrust into the mess-room in which Guy was partaking of his breakfast, and an officer—a smart, spruce young fellow with the braiding of a lieutenant—turned a pair of stern eyes upon the two of them. But the eyes twinkled a moment later when they had penetrated the cloud of smoke and perceived Jo beyond it.

52 The Armoured-car Scouts

"Oh!"

"Me, sir!" declared the incorrigible Jo.

"Exactly! Precisely! No room for error!"

"No, sir!"

"And the other?" demanded the officer, peering through the smoke.

"Came aboard yesterday; taking in his victuals, sir," explained Jo, turning a beaming countenance upon the officer, who once more gave expression to a somewhat astonished "Oh!" and peered even harder.

"Smart! Quite took me in," he told himself, "for I thought it was one of our young petty officers. Very smart indeed, and I like his looks. Yesterday, of course, he had the appearance of a drowned rat as they brought him aboard; but, then, no one looks his best when he's half-dead and half-frozen. Carry on!" he said aloud.

"Yessir!"

"I'd like to see this young fellow when he's had his meal!"

"Precisely, sir! Ready in ten minutes!"

If that officer had remained but half a minute longer he would have burst into laughter himself, for who could resist the honest Jo and his jovial countenance? Polite always, strictly obedient, eager to carry out any orders, and ever setting an example to younger men and recruits to the service, Jo had long since become a sort of privileged individual—one whom we

may state was wise enough not to take advantage of that flattering position. A favourite wherever he went, his smiling face and his jovial ways won him friends in all directions. So the officer left the place chuckling, no longer attempting to suppress his amusement, though when he arrived on deck and reflected for a moment he could find no real solid reason for his laughter. It was just the infectious way Jo had about him—just his rollicking, reckless sort of manner.

“And now, me lad, to get on with the yarn after this ’ere interruption; we’ve had yer tale, you’ve said that you was goin’ home to take up a job with the British army, and I’ve stood ’ere, or sat—for there ain’t much difference—between you and that army, and I’ve made bold to remind you, seein’ that you seem to have forgotten, that there’s such a thing as the British navy. What’s wrong with the British navy—eh?”

In lightning-like manner his mood changed, and he became stern and severe again, sitting back there, his head against the bulkhead, those rather fierce little eyes of his gleaming at Guy through the clouds of smoke which he continued to shoot in jets at him.

“Wrong with the navy? Nothing!” laughed Guy. “Perhaps now you will tell me a little more about it, about yourself, the men I see aboard—for there seem to be quite a number of them.”

“Detachment His Majesty’s navy — armoured-car

54 The Armoured-car Scouts

detachment, me lad, and don't forget it. Bound for—— Hush!—not a word!—Somewhere! Wait, though. You look like a confidential, trustworthy sort of young Britisher—Russia! me lad—bound for Russia—big place—eh? Well, you guess the exact position we're making for."

"And those vehicles I saw are armoured cars—eh!" asked Guy, his interest tickled and his curiosity aroused by the tale which Jo was unfolding—"bound for Russia too! Yes, it's a big country, I'll admit, though I happen to have travelled over a very great part of it."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Travelled through Russia, me boy? Maybe you can speak the lingo? Of course you can, seein' as how you've lived there, according to the yarn you've been spinnin'."

"Nothing unusual in it," Guy told him. "I speak Russian as well as I speak English, and can make myself understood amongst some of the tribes over the border."

"And you're going to waste yourself on the army?" shouted Jo, now roused to quite a pitch of excitement. "Why—mind you, me lad," he said of a sudden, soberly enough now, "I didn't mean that about wasting yourself on the army, because everyone knows the sort of fight they've put up, and how our men in

France, in Gallipoli, and lots of other places have stuck to their guns, and met the enemy—but, look 'ere! Let's go astern for a minute—you can speak Russian just like yer own language!"

"I can."

"Then just you come along with me, young shaver."

Jo's mood was transformed in a moment into quite another—a sober, resolute, business-like mood—which caused him to knock the ashes out of his pipe straightway, to settle the collar of his coat about his neck, and to make for the door promptly, beckoning Guy to follow. Thence they made their way to that lieutenant's quarters, and, having announced themselves, were admitted.

"Speaks Russian like a native, sir," said Jo, pointing an incriminating finger at our hero, "like a blessed native."

"Oh! Like a native? Yes, excellent—but, why?" the Lieutenant asked Jo quite politely, a little puzzled as to the reason for the mariner venturing the information.

"Why!" exclaimed Jo, almost indignantly. "Beg parding, sir, but ain't we a-bound for Russia?"

"We are," admitted the Lieutenant. "I think I may say that that is a fact understood by all of us."

"And who's a-goin' to show us the ropes, sir? Who's a-goin' to take us by the hand and tell us what to do, and explain things for us to the people? Unless,

56 The Armoured-car Scouts

of course, sir," added Jo, his eyes showing just the merest suspicion of a twinkle, "which is quite natural like, sir, I'm sure—in fact it seems to me as if it was most likely—unless, maybe, sir, as you speaks Russian like a native?"

"I speak Russian like a native! Ho, ho!" laughed the officer, "only wish I did. Why, there's no one in the detachment who understands much about the language. But—yes—now—I shouldn't wonder—why—of course——

"Naturally, sir," interjected Jo politely.

"Just so! Naturally we shall want—I think I may say definitely we shall want an——

"Interpreter, of course, sir; good idea!" ventured the sailor. "And what's 'ere before us but a young feller what knows Russian backwards, and what's already got a hate for them Germans that's worth havin'."

It was a queer way in which to describe Guy's certainly not too resentful feeling for the enemy; for, to be quite accurate, his busy life had prevented him from taking much notice of Germans, or of any other nationality other than his own and the Russian people with whom he lived. Yet he was conscious enough all the time he had been in Russia of a feeling of irritation against the subjects of the Kaiser—those fat, bland, scheming, inquisitive, and grasping peaceful penetrators; those gentlemen, subsidized by the

Berlin Government, who, leaving their own country for the late Tsar's dominions, sprang up like mushrooms in every city and provincial town, always having means with which to start a business, and who promptly under-cut and under-sold every legitimate trader in the country. Oh yes! he had had always—just as his father had had—a half indefinite feeling of resentment; yet, seeing that Ernst Blott—a German of the Germans—was Guy's father's partner, that resentment to the German race was always subdued, as it were, and certainly not too prominent. But now—now—surely—there was a difference—Ernst Blott was doubtless a deep-dyed scoundrel.

“Like many another of them, I fear,” Guy had reflected, “yes, like many another of them, for many are the evil things that they have done in Russia.”

Speaking personally, therefore, Guy may be said to have had no particular animus against the Kaiser's people, though, to be sure, he loathed the men who had been capable of those murders in Belgium, who had displayed their brutality to the whole world, and demonstrated their *Kultur* by acts of appalling frightfulness in all directions. To Ernst Blott he had a most decided objection, while his deepest feeling was one of patriotism only—not of hate—a desire to do his duty at a time when every man was wanted. And now, Jo's impulsive questions and suggestions attracted him greatly.

58 The Armoured-car Scouts

"Interpreter!" he repeated.

"Oh," said the Lieutenant, looking up sharply at him, "of course we are bound to want one on our arrival; and who better than one of our own countrymen? But of course the matter must go before the commander, and, besides, we shall want credentials with you; and you will understand that I am not able to say anything definite at the moment. We'll wait till we get to Archangel, which we shall reach perhaps a week hence."

Jo grinned. Guy, infected by the sailor, found himself actually replying to that incorrigible mariner's broad wink. The Lieutenant smiled, grinned, and began to bubble with laughter.

"Get along with the two of you," he cried, "and don't get into mischief."

When Guy discovered time to look about him—for what with interviews with the Lieutenant, and what with the active little sailor who literally and metaphorically sat in his pocket, his hours were fully occupied—he was able to discover the fact that this armoured-car detachment, which was on its way to Russia, was indeed no paltry affair, no "corporal's guard", but quite a formidable little body of well-set-up, selected men of the British navy, well officered, and well provided with the latest thing—the last word in fact—in armoured cars and tenders and motor-bicycles.

"We'll just make them German skunks squirm,"

said Jo, as he did "showman", and personally conducted Guy round the armoured cars, with their axles jacked up on blocks of wood set between decks, lashed firmly down so that the tossing of the ship should not move them. "And now, young feller me lad, seein' as how you're now more than half a sailor, let's start in yarning again. What about this 'ere gal? Ho, I don't think! How did you happen to come across her? Truth now, me boy, none of yer blarney fer me; I'm too old a bird to be taken in by a shaver."

The incorrigible Jo cocked his peaked cap at a rather sharper angle, pulled down the lapels of his coat, and braced his shoulders. Who could say? Perhaps some of his old associates thought Jo, besides being such a jovial fellow, quite a dog—a "sea-dog"—well noted for gallantry both out of and in action.

"How did I come to drop across her? I didn't. She literally dropped across me—was washed right on top of my face, and nearly sent me under. Who is she? I don't know from Adam; I shouldn't recognize her if I met her now walking along the deck; and I'll be quite frank with you—er—Jo——"

"Oh, don't you be thin-skinned!" the sailor told him. "Jo's me. Everyone knows Jo. I ain't a stand-offish sort of beggar, and if I was, I'd want yer to use the whole long string of Christian names me pa give me, what 'ud be worse than trying to talk German; so I'll be fair—call me Jo."

60 The Armoured-car Scouts

“I’d clean forgotten all about her.”

It was curious that just at that moment a messenger touched our hero on the shoulder, jerked a very dirty thumb in the direction of the Lieutenant’s cabin, and intimated, with a curious sort of leer and a jerk of his head, that Guy was wanted.

“Horders!” he bellowed hoarsely, his voice seeming to come from his boots rather than from his throat. “Horders! Wanted at once.”

Straightway Guy returned to the Lieutenant’s cabin, and accompanied him to the private saloon down below, where, as they entered, they caught sight of a stewardess, and opposite her the figure of a girl, who rose at once on their entrance and stepped a little dizzily towards them. Fixing her eyes on Guy, she held out a hand, while her face, which had been unnaturally pale, flushed, and her lips trembled.

“I want to thank you very much for saving me,” she said very simply. “I didn’t know until this morning what had happened—didn’t remember that awful wreck, the torpedoing of the ship by the Germans. I would like you to meet my father, sir, so that he, too, and my mother, could thank you for saving their daughter.”

It was one of those positions not exactly sought after by young gentlemen of Guy’s age, one, indeed, from which the average young fellow would do his utmost, as a general rule, to escape, for what was

there to do but to feel awkward, to find it difficult to make a suitable reply, to become suddenly conscious of the fact that one's feet were very big and ungainly and clumsy, and that one's face had flushed a furious red? Altogether it was one of those curiously awkward situations which men hate, and young men perhaps more than all others. Guy stuttered and muttered, and became most absurdly flustered; he kicked the edge of the table, and contrived, most unfortunately, to insert the toe of one of the boots Jo had given him beneath the saloon carpet, thus almost coming a cropper at the feet of the little lady who was extending her hand towards him so prettily. If Guy had never felt an utter fool before, he felt it at that moment, and could have literally kicked himself for his stupid ungainliness.

"I—you—don't you know," he stuttered; "we—but, there you are——"

"Precisely," smiled the Lieutenant, while the stewardess turned on Guy a glance which was both amused and admiring.

"My little patient wouldn't rest till I had sent for you," she said. "She wants to thank you for a most gallant act. Tell her how it happened."

The bashful Guy contrived to summon up sufficient *savoir faire* to smother his blushes, to suppress his confusion, and to control those stupid legs of his. He took the little hand extended to him, pressed

62 The Armoured-car Scouts

it, and bowed over it, and asked the lady to be seated.

"Why—well, we—— Oh, don't you know!" he began desperately; "that is to say, the ship was torpedoed."

"Ha-ha-ha!" came from the Lieutenant, who was enjoying the scene immensely. "Here's news! Here's news for us, young lady; 'the ship was torpedoed'. Now you know a good deal about it."

Guy cast one furious glance at him, and then laughed too, while both the stewardess and the girl joined in the merriment.

"Yes?" said the latter encouragingly; "and the ship began to sink——?"

"Just so," Guy broke in, taking courage; "and as she lurched I was shot across the deck and into the sea. I suppose I really ought to try to make it look as though I saw you there, and dived in after you. Well, I didn't! Sorry!"

That set them all laughing again, and helped him greatly to regain his composure.

"Then something was washed right down on top of me and pushed me under. It was you," he declared, nodding his head at the little lady, who gave vent to a startled "Oh!" "Then, you see," went on Guy, "don't you know, I had a life-preserver on—you hadn't."

"Just so," said the Lieutenant. "He had a life-

preserver on—you hadn't. That's the excuse he's going to make. Go on, my lad."

"And so, of course, naturally, any fellow would do it, wouldn't he?" said Guy, appealing to the three of them. "Of course I held you up, and, besides, there wasn't anything in it; for one of the smashed boats was alongside us, and helped to support us both. The rest was the affair of the Lieutenant here and his men; they are the people you ought to thank, for they saved us."

"And please let me have your name," said the girl, exchanging smiling glances with the stewardess and the naval officer, glances which told quite clearly without words that she quite appreciated the full value of the service which Guy had rendered. As for our hero, he blurted out his name at once, and turned a glance over his shoulder at the door, as much as to say that he hoped that the interview was nearly ended. But a movement on the part of the girl suddenly attracted his attention; she sat upright, and her face, from which the colour had departed after the very commencement of this interview, again flushed most vividly. She gave vent to an exclamation, and started to her feet.

"Guy Grammond!" she cried. "Guy Grammond! But are you sure——?"

"Sure!" Guy looked at her with his mouth wide open, which was not exactly polite, to say the least of

64 The Armoured-car Scouts

it. But consider! Here was a sane, generally collected and cool young fellow asked in the first place to declare his name, and then asked in the next breath whether he was quite sure that he had given a correct one. "Well, I'm jiggered!" he was muttering beneath his breath. "Am I crazy, or——"

"But," she cried, looking at him as if she had been startled, her eyes dancing, "Grammond? Please tell me where you come from! And don't think me inquisitive, but the name is quite an uncommon one, and I am interested."

Guy told her promptly.

"I have been in Russia nearly all my life," he said. "My father and mother lived there, and are now dead."

"Russia!" she cried. "Listen. My name is Lucy Harding, and my aunt ran away from home, perhaps twenty years ago, to marry a man of the name of Grammond. They went to Russia. We lost sight of them entirely. It was always a grief to my father."

"Oh!"

It was Guy's turn to exclaim, to stare at the girl with wide-open mouth, looking, we must admit, rather stupid and not a little disconcerted. "Oh! Then I suppose," he said at last——

"You mean," broke in the Lieutenant, chuckling loudly, "that you are delighted to hear that you have

had the good fortune to save the life of your first cousin."

And so he had. When Miss Harding had recovered somewhat further from her immersion in the cold water, and was able to chat with our hero, he learned that she was indeed his first cousin, on her way from Sweden to England, where her parents lived, having just completed a long stay on the continent of Europe. Stranger still, the ship, having called in at a Swedish port *en route* to Archangel—driven there by exceedingly bad weather—Guy was persuaded by his cousin and by the Lieutenant to return to England with her.

"You'd far better go," the latter told him. "We're not likely to move away from Archangel for quite a little time, for the country, as you know better than I do, is covered with snow. Go home and make the acquaintance of these people of yours whom you have never met; give them a chance to thank the fellow who saved their daughter and his first cousin. You're friendless? No—no—no! Not friendless, for haven't you made plenty of them? And isn't Jo like a leech?—now that he's got to know you. But you're an orphan, you've your way to make in the world, and orphans and people starting out in life can't do without the help and friendship of others."

Thus it happened that Guy took ship with his cousin and escorted her back to England, where Lucy's

66 The Armoured-car Scouts

parents gave him the warmest of welcomes, and, indeed, insisted upon his staying with them.

“Not a word! Not a word!” said Mr. Harding, gripping his hand on the night of his arrival, as the two sat in his den. “Not a word, Guy! I won’t listen to it! Of course, naturally, just as naturally as you went to the rescue of my daughter, I shall take the place of your unfortunate father. Bah! I’m your uncle! Haven’t I a right to look after you? Of course I have. I shall fit you out, and send you to join that detachment in Russia.”

And fit him out Mr. Harding did, so that in the course of two or three weeks Guy, now possessed of relatives once more, and decidedly popular with them, embarked once again for the country in which he had lived all his life, little dreaming of the fighting he was to see, and of the strange adventures in which attachment to that armoured-car detachment of the navy would involve him. He didn’t care. A glimpse at Britain, full information of the general situation, had imbued him with the strong desire to “do his bit”—to do his share in the general fighting, to help to crush the German menace.

CHAPTER IV

On Outpost Duty

"WHY! That's you! Who'd have thought it? We'd marked you down long ago as a deserter."

"A deserter! Why, I——!" exploded Guy. **"A deserter!"**

"Certainly, me lad, all that and more," growled Jo, the ubiquitous and smiling Jo, trying to look severe and failing hopelessly. Then he seized Guy's hand with a vigour one hardly expected from a man of his somewhat small proportions. **"Oh! ain't I glad to see you just,"** he shouted. **"And what's happened? And where have you been all this time? for it's months since we last saw you; and, me boy, what about the gal? Now then, none of your trying to look ignorant like, and as though you'd never heard tell of any gal. The one what you saved, I mean—the gal them Germans tried to drown when they torpedoed you in the North Sea. Ho—ho—ho!"** chuckled the mariner, quizzing Guy now that he saw the colour rush to his cheeks, laughing uproariously, teasing him in his own manner.

68 The Armoured-car Scouts

And Guy was perforce obliged to submit, good-humouredly we are pleased to be able to report, for indeed he had every reason to be light-hearted. Consider! He had set out from his newly-discovered home in England with a kit and possessions which he had never thought to possess, and, better than all, with the knowledge that he had now stanch friends to leave behind him—friends who would feel some interest in him while he was fighting. Yet, despite his eagerness, he had had to curb his impatience, seeing that weather and wind and storm and the uncontrolled strength of the ocean once more baffled him. Thrust this way and that, his ship making for the port of Archangel found ice closing in upon her. Arrived there, Guy ran to Petrograd, but there was no news of the British naval armoured-car detachment.

"It is stranded," he was told. "The ship bringing it to Russia has been swept somewhere into the Arctic by the winter gales, and we are told that the men are wintering somewhere there. So you are to join the detachment as interpreter—eh? Very good! You will have to wait until winter is over. What will you do—eh? Ah!"

The man who was speaking—an official at the Russian war office—looked Guy up and down inquisitively, in quite a friendly manner, however, and summed him up rapidly.

"British—yes! But a little Russian, and speaks

like a native. Come," he said, "surely we can find work for such an individual. Now, let me think; yes—you have a knowledge of machinery?"

Guy had perforce to shake his head; not that he was entirely ignorant of machinery, for we may explain at this moment, what we have omitted to mention before, the fact that his father and that scoundrel of a German—Ernst Blott—had specialized for years in the supply of machinery of all descriptions, together with other classes of merchandise, to Russian people. Indeed, Guy had of late—that is, before the commencement of the war—been travelling round inspecting such machinery; and though it was true that he had not up to date had much to do with the parts of machines themselves, yet he knew the business end of most tools, could use a hammer, a file, and a vice with any mechanic, and, while not competent to undertake serious repairs, had at any rate the theory and the scientific side of machinery, such as concerned his father's business, at his finger tips. Thus it followed that Guy, having shaken his head a little dubiously, now nodded with remarkable emphasis:

"Oh! Wait a moment, though," he said. "Machinery? Of course I know something, though I am not qualified to undertake big repairs, but usual motor-car repairs, small breakdowns on the road, and so on. Yes, certainly I can manage them."

The official looked him up and down again in that

inquisitive sort of manner, though there was a far-away look in his eyes, and turning abruptly on his heels he beckoned Guy to follow him into a room from which he had just emerged.

“You are to join this British naval armoured-car detachment—eh?” he asked. “Well then, why not become proficient in the management of an armoured car during the winter. Snow-ploughs have of course cleared the roads hereabouts, and a motor-car can be driven in Petrograd; we have a few here all ready, and are designing others. Now, if you wish it, you shall go to the shops, and instructions will be sent to give you facilities to understand the cars thoroughly. Of course, seeing that you are to have a commission with the British you will be given it now, and that will carry certain pay and allowances.”

Guy thanked him heartily, and, picking up his bag, which contained practically all his possessions, he took a droshky to the barracks in which the workshops were situated, where he was given a room and a shakedown. And during the four months which followed, till indeed spring sunshine flooded the plains of Russia, and flowers began to spring into being, till then he worked at that place becoming familiar with an armoured car—such as the Russians had—from one end to the other, till he could manœuvre such vehicles in all sorts of difficult places, and was competent to take one almost anywhere, and to bring it

back—providing its wheels and its essential parts were not shattered.

And here he was with the British naval armoured-car detachment—released from its Arctic prison somewhere in the neighbourhood of Archangel, and transferred by rail to the south of Russia, to the Caucasus region, in fact to the heart of Erzerum, the Armenian city captured by a dashing effort on the part of the troops of the Grand Duke Nicholas. It was a wonderful transformation indeed, from the winter quarters which Jo and his comrades, and Guy in Petrograd, had occupied. Then snows surrounded them in every direction, and mountains were nowhere in evidence. Now they were perched on a mountain plateau 5000 feet above sea-level, with ranges of hills and mountains all about them, while at their feet, stretching south and west of them, were the plains of Turkey, broken in many directions by peaks, and ridges, and elevations approximating to the size of mountains.

“A very difficult country in which to manœuvre horses even,” said a Russian officer of the division to which the British armoured-car detachment was now attached. “See for yourselves: the crests of the ridges and mountains are still covered with snow, and in fact are seldom free from it. Only in such cities as this are there roads, or anything deserving of the name, everywhere else there are merely tracks, often

strewn with boulders, and more fit for camel transport than for vehicles. But even camels are barred from progress over the mountains, where the passes are often high and extremely broken and rugged, not to mention their steepness—but——”

“But,” smiled the Lieutenant, whose acquaintance we have already made, though we perforce neglect to mention his name, seeing this armoured-car detachment has become historical, “but if anyone or anything can get over the country, my friend, we shall do so.”

It was quite true that the Russian officer did not understand a word, and equally true that the Lieutenant had not been able to gather more than the sense of what the officer had been saying, for Guy—the youthful interpreter whom the detachment had brought with them—happened to be absent; but the gesticulations of the Russian officer, the way in which he pointed and drew attention to distant ranges and ridges, to the road on which they stood, and other matters, were significant enough. Somehow, indeed, when in foreign countries, officers and men, though unable to speak one another's language, get on in the most wonderful manner.

A week after the detachment had reached the captured city of Erzerum on the Armenian plateau, and had become a little familiar with their surroundings, and had, moreover, got their fleet of cars into first-

class running order, a message was received from the Russian head-quarters.

"We are anxious to know what forces the enemy have on our left flank. Please investigate for us."

Guy read the message and translated it to the Commander.

"Hum!" said the latter, "left flank—right over there—eh?" for he was standing on the threshold of the house where he and other British officers were billeted. "Rough country—eh? Know it, Guy?"

"I have been down in this direction once before, sir," answered our hero, "but I can't pretend to know the route, for indeed there isn't one. We shall have to find a track for ourselves; for caravans passing from here into Persia do not always follow a precise route; they find a track for themselves, and indeed take the path of least resistance. But you'll want——"

The Commander looked at him sternly, inquisitively, and his eyes twinkled.

"We shan't want an interpreter," he said.

Guy's jaw dropped, and for a moment he felt utterly miserable; then, raising his eyes, he swept them first over the inscrutable features of the gallant Commander, and a second later over the grinning face of the ubiquitous Jo, who, if he had lived in Guy's pocket at their first acquaintance, might truthfully be said to live now in that of the Commander.

"No, sir," the jovial mariner exclaimed, "certainly

not, sir, no interpreter wanted; but, a-beggin' parding, sir, you'll want me, I'm certain."

Who could resist such a jovial fellow? and of course, as everyone knew, wherever the detachment went, or wherever a portion of it was ordered, there too its interpreter must go, for without Guy officers and men were likely to be rendered helpless. Consider, then, the excitement of our hero when, that very night, he learned that a party was to leave the city at dawn on the morrow, and with it himself also. Indeed, the dawn had only just broken, and the mist surrounding this upland plateau was as yet only half scattered, when half a dozen cars—those quaint-looking, yet silent cars which the detachment had brought with them—slid out of the city of Erzerum, leaving it for the most part only just awakened, and slowly descended towards the plains below—plains across which Russian troops had swept some weeks before, driving the Turks and Kurds before them. Then a track to the left was taken, and for some hours the cavalcade pushed on, sometimes at a quite respectable pace, for the road was good just there, and at others crawling only, for boulders and ruts and hollows obstructed their progress. By noon they had gained a hollow at the foot of a range which cut right across their path, and there they pulled up for rest and refreshment.

"We must be well away from the left of the Russians

by now," said the Lieutenant, who was in command of this small party, "and ought soon to be taking steps to keep a look-out. Once we get to the top of this range—which doesn't look to be an altogether easy matter—I shall post one man in advance on a motor-bicycle and keep another one in rear on a similar mount, so as to signal the approach of enemies. Guy, you are officially interpreter to this crowd, but I won't disguise the fact from you, that a man who can speak Russian, and can, as you tell us, get along with natives in this part, would be useful in advance, acting as scout for the party. Of course," he went on, "I can't very well order you to——"

"I'll go gladly," Guy told him, almost shouted, bubbling with delight. "Then I am to go on a motor-bicycle, sir? Splendid! If I may, I will set off immediately after lunch, and halt at the top of the range, from which post I ought to be able to get a splendid view of the country beyond."

By now the handy-men along with the cars—and none were more handy than the gallant Jo—had built a fire beside the roadway, using wood extracted from a low-growing cactus plant which was to be found in all directions. One of them had produced a tripod, and another a kettle, while Jo conjured from the depths of a large wooden box, which he kept in the car used as a tender, a huge frying-pan, and other essential details such as butter, pepper, new-laid

76 The Armoured-car Scouts

eggs, and a parcel wrapped in fine canvas, which looked suspiciously like a ham ready for cutting. Half an hour later, in fact, the whole party, officers and men, with that delightful *camaraderie* to be found in our two services, were seated about the fire, for a chill wind still swept across these plains in spite of the arrival of spring, and in spite of the sun which now and again peeped down at them. There they discussed that famous British dish—eggs and bacon—with a gusto which showed their appreciation.

“Finished now, sir,” Guy reported, a little later, when he had enjoyed a cigarette and had looked to the machine which he was to ride, a faithful Douglas, one of those handy little motor-bicycles which, while not too unwieldy, are yet capable of speedy progress. Carried on the footboard of one of the cars up till this moment, it could be detached from the clips which held it in a few seconds; and now, erected on its stand, the engine had been running for some few minutes in a manner which showed that it was in perfect condition.

“Good! Then take care of yourself,” the Lieutenant told our hero. “No dashing ahead without sense, and right into the midst of the enemy; go quietly, my lad, and when you get to the top don’t stand out on the sky-line, but halt before you reach the summit, and then scout cleverly, so that no one can see you. Wait; you’ll want glasses.”

"I've got them, sir," Guy answered, for indeed his uncle had seen to that before he left England, and had presented him with a handsome pair of binoculars.

"Then off with you! And mind what I said."

Pushing the motor-bicycle off its stand, and setting the engine in motion by means of the kick-starter, Guy bestrode the machine, pulled his cap firmly down on to his head, settled the carbine slung over his shoulders, engaged his gears, and let his clutch in gently. Phiz! The bicycle went off like a shot, the engine emitting those snappy, machine-gun-like reports which tell of power and efficiency.

Click! In went a second gear; and again, click! and he was rushing along with his top gear engaged, and the engine purring and roaring beneath him. It was perhaps half an hour later when, after a long and hard climb, and after traversing a route which, commencing as a reasonable road, had become very soon a mere track, and of late only a trail obstructed by numbers of boulders, he reached a spot perhaps some twenty yards below the summit of the pass for which he was making, his engine by this time being almost red-hot with its exertions.

"Give it time to cool down," he thought, as he threw out his gear and stopped the engine, and then pulled the machine up on to its stand. "Now for the top of the ridge, and, first of all, a good look round to

78 The Armoured-car Scouts

see that there's no one in the immediate neighbourhood."

His friends down below, watching him through their glasses, saw him dismount and leave his machine, saw him, too, peer round in all directions—in front, on either side, and behind him—and then watched as, releasing his glasses from their case he slung them round his neck, and then, bending low and trailing his rifle, started upwards. Perhaps another ten minutes elapsed before he reached the summit, where those friends below saw him halt again, saw him creep in behind a mass of boulders, and later, watching carefully, caught sight of his head—now without a cap—being raised ever so cautiously from the centre of those boulders.

Stretched on his face on an uneven, rocky ledge, Guy had, in fact, taken up a strategic position from which he was able to peer out and down into the country beyond—a rolling plain much like that behind him, and, so far as his glasses showed him, up to that moment clear of all human beings. There was not even a house or a hut in sight, not a flock of beasts of any description, only a green expanse, getting greener in one part where the land dipped into a hollow, from the depths of which the light was reflected from the surface of a stream which babbled on towards the south, and was lost in a distant range of mountains. Slowly his glasses swept round, now

peering into nooks and crannies amongst the hills, now investigating the depths of some hollow, and gradually covering the ground nearer to the pass on which he was lying.

It was just when, with an exclamation, he had sighted a group of figures at the foot of the range that something occurred to make him give vent to an even sharper exclamation.

Ping! Something plunked against an earth bank on his left, throwing a shower of dust over him, and, immediately after, ricocheted from the boulder on which he was lying, chipping a piece from it not a foot from his head, and went off howling and screaming into the distance.

“What’s that? Suspiciously like a shot! Where from, I wonder?” said Guy, peering off to his left, for common sense, and a certain amount of sagacity—of which Guy was by no means devoid—told him that the bullet had come from that side.

“Ping! Ping! Plunk! Two shots rang out now—two short, sharp reports, which made it perfectly clear that someone, indeed, was firing at him. For some reason or other he had not heard the report of the first shot; perhaps because whoever held the rifle had been standing in some hollow, which had directed the sound elsewhere; or perhaps because Guy himself was so startled by that sudden ping on his left, by the earth scattered over him, and by the shriek of the

80 The Armoured-car Scouts

bullet as it wobbled off into distance that he had failed to detect the sound. Now, however, there was no doubt about it.

“And jolly close, too, those bullets,” he thought as he wriggled deeper into the hole he had found and occupied between the boulders. “This won’t do at all; for those beggars—there are two of them, I’m sure—who have spotted me have the best of the bargain, seeing that as yet I can’t make out where they are hiding.”

Ping! Plunk! Ping! Ping! More shots—four of them—so rapidly repeated, one after another, that it was clear that no man—not even a man using the magazine of his rifle—could put them in so quickly. We speak the truth of our young hero, and venture to tell the reader precisely what followed. Guy was flustered—thoroughly flustered—for a few moments. Indeed, who would not have been somewhat put out—flustered if you will—scared in many cases, under similar conditions? For, consider: here he was alone, though, to be sure, the knowledge that his friends down in the hollow at the foot of this range had their glasses on him gave him a great deal of encouragement, yet for all practical purposes here he was alone—by himself—in as peaceful surroundings as one could well encounter, and yet surroundings the peace of which was suddenly and unexpectedly broken in the most dramatic and exciting manner. First one bullet had

narrowly missed his head, then three had followed, swishing by him, and now a battery of four rifles had been turned upon him, and, but for the fact that he had crept a little lower, one or more would certainly have hit him. Before he heard those four reports he saw a patch of grass growing from a tiny hollow on a boulder on his left stir and some blades tremble; while at the same instant a missile struck the same boulder closer to his head than was agreeable, and, happening to discover a weather-worn crevice, forced its way in, acting like a wedge, and split the rock asunder, sending chips in all directions, one of which struck him violently on the forehead. Not that Guy felt it in that somewhat strenuous moment, or heeded the fact that he was wounded; indeed, it was only when drops of blood trickled down his nose and dropped upon his hands some minutes later that he recollected the occurrence, and by then he had made such a change in his position that the incident was not likely to be repeated.

“When you’re in a tight hole, and can’t see the chaps who are flinging bullets at you, put ’em in the same sort of position,” he muttered, at the same time rolling from the ridge he had selected. Squirming his way downwards, and creeping rapidly across behind the boulders till he was on the far side of the track—the apology for a road—which crossed this pass, he sought shelter in a natural furrow—perhaps a ditch, in any case a crevice in the earth—water-worn,

deep, and rugged, and affording splendid protection. Creeping along this on hands and knees until it got deeper, when he rose to his feet and ran as quickly as was possible, he finally gained a point well in advance of that which he had previously occupied, and, coming again upon a mass of rock and boulders, which cut this natural ditch abruptly and stopped its further progress, he wormed his way in amongst the boulders, and, taking care to keep both head and rifle well below their topmost level, sought for a crevice, and, having found one, peered out into the open. Meanwhile he had heard more than a dozen shots fired, though on this occasion no bullets had come near him.

“Ah!” He saw a head thrust up over the way, perhaps one hundred yards from the spot he had been occupying—the head of a Kurd, one of those wild Turkish horsemen who act as cavalry for the Turkish forces, and with whom Russian Cossacks had already crossed sabres on many an occasion. Then the shoulders of the man became visible, and as Guy watched he saw the fellow lift himself on his hands, sit up on his haunches, and finally rise to his feet. Another figure, perhaps ten yards to the man’s right, then put in an appearance; and very soon there were half a dozen of them—all Kurds—slowly moving towards the top of the pass where Guy had been scouting.

“And there, of course, are their horses, with one of their number holding them,” thought Guy a little later, catching sight of a group of animals, behind the men and placed in a natural hollow. “Now, what’s to be done? Am I to allow the beggars to close in and discover my bicycle, and then — then what? Polish me off, signal to their friends down below, and attack our men in the hollow? That won’t do,” he told himself sternly. “I’ll have to shoot. Jupiter! It’s not nice to fire on men coming along in the open, even if they have peppered me with bullets. I don’t like it at all. I’ve never done such a thing before in my life, only—— Ah! that’s better!”

Someone had seen him, or perhaps one of that group of six suspected his presence amongst those boulders, for of a sudden a bullet splashed on to a rock on Guy’s right, and, stripping off its capsule by the contact, sent nickel and lead splintering into the open. Guy sat up on one knee, took steady aim, and pulled his trigger—pulled it with that steadiness which he had been taught to practise when firing at the butts in Russia.

“Got him! Good shot—eh! What?” he exclaimed, and then shivered; for after all it was an ugly sight that he looked at.

That Kurd—a man whom he had never met before, for whom he had no particular dislike, yet an enemy all the same, and one whom common sense

84 The Armoured-car Scouts

and his experience of life told him would willingly take his life if he got the opportunity—the man suddenly halted, bent backwards, dropped his rifle, and then fell with a shriek and rolled down the grassy slope which he had been crossing. Yes, an ugly sight. But how often repeated in this terrible war now raging! It unnerved Guy for the moment, and he sat there with his bolt half-drawn, the cartridge not yet ejected from the breech, and his eyes fixed upon that hideous rolling figure, his ears still tingling with that ugly shriek.

Ping! A bullet struck the boulder behind which he was kneeling, and the report of the rifle was followed by such shouts and shrieks that he was instantly brought to his senses. He peered through the crevice through which he had fired but a minute before, and once more we tell only the truth when we say that for an instant this young Briton felt very like bolting. For five Kurds of wild and fierce appearance—five savage fellows armed to the teeth and shouting their hatred of him—were charging across that green slope on the side of this mountain range direct for the position he was occupying. That one shout had, as it were, set the signal; and now, with rifles trailing or brandished above their heads, led by a man bigger than his comrades, a huge fellow who gripped a curved weapon in his right hand and swung his rifle in the left, the five raced towards him, evidently bent

on routing him out and killing him before he could do further damage.

One sudden start, that single moment of hesitation—and who could reproach our hero?—and Guy settled down to the job before him. The expended cartridge was flicked from the breech, his thumb had already opened the cut-off, and now as a fresh cartridge was pushed up by the spring the bolt went home with a snap.

“Going to be a battle,” said Guy lightly. “Well, we’ll see who’s going to come best out of the business.”

CHAPTER V

A Hot Corner

DOWN below, in the hollow where that party of the British naval armoured-car detachment had halted, the fire blazed even more merrily perhaps than it had done when Guy left his comrades. The men were for the most part still seated about the flames, enjoying the heat, stretching out those big, muscular hands of theirs, smoking serenely, and as confident of their superiority and as happy under these strange circumstances as they would have been aboard a Dreadnought.

Jo, the ever merry Jo, however, was not one of the group, for he and the Lieutenant stood, with their backs leaning against the mudguards of one of the armoured cars, glasses glued to their eyes as they watched the path—that rough track creeping over the top of the pass—where Guy's motor-bicycle could be seen standing.

"I don't see him; do you?" asked the Lieutenant after awhile, just a trace of anxiety in his voice. "Where's he got to? We traced him from his bicycle

across to the left, and saw him wriggle in amongst some rocks; then I lost him."

"Ditto, sir," came the laconic answer, perhaps not so lightly spoken as was usually Jo's custom. Was he anxious too? Was there just a trace of trouble in his tones as he had detected in those of the Lieutenant?

The two men dropped their glasses, peered with their naked eyes at the distant heights, and then looked at one another.

"I——" began the Lieutenant. "Where's he got to?"

"Wish you'd sent me along with him, sir," exclaimed Jo, lifting his glasses again and fastening them on the track. "Ain't seen him this last five minutes. Perhaps, though, he's just crawled over the brow, having first of all looked to see whether there were any people coming. You can trust him, sir—you can trust that young shaver, for he's got his wits about him. Only, as I was a-sayin', sir, I——"

"What were you saying?" asked the Lieutenant, raising his own glasses. "Yes, I do wish someone else had gone with that fellow."

"Stop! What's that? Who's that?" demanded Jo, beginning to point. "Look at him! He's sliding from the rocks, creeping across the road, and bending low, as though he'd seen someone near him. Did you hear a sound, sir? Did you hear a shot? It's not

more than a mile from this point to where he halted, and as the wind's in this direction we'd hear a shot that distance. Listen! Wasn't that one?"

The Lieutenant made not so much as a movement; he stood there, his feet wide apart, his shoulders braced, his glasses fixed on the mountain pass, on Guy's bicycle, and on the spot where he had seen him dive under cover. For more than a minute he stood in that position, and then, of a sudden, dropped his glasses, letting them dangle from the leather thong which went about his neck, and, turning to the men, gave a sharp order.

"To your posts—quick!" he commanded. "I heard shots up there; our comrade has come in contact with some of the enemy. Get your engines running and make ready to move off."

Then it was Jo's turn. The hand with which he had been pointing was now stretched out towards his friend, while one gnarled and dirty finger indicated the spot on which his eyes were directed.

"Look, sir!" he shouted. "Four or five men, armed and waving their weapons, rushing towards the road—and—Lor'! There's a thing! That's young Guy! One of 'em's bowled over."

One of them, indeed, was seen to fall as the Lieutenant swung his glasses up again, and, with Jo, fixed his eyes upon the top of the pass. Then they saw two more of those charging figures tumble on their faces,

double up, and then disappear in the grass or amongst the boulders, and watched as three others—one some yards in front of his comrades—held on towards the track, that man in front now without his rifle, but holding some other weapon in his hand and swinging his arms wildly. There was no mistaking what was taking place up there above them; for though they could not hear the shots, the shrieks, and the threatening imprecations of those three dismounted Kurd horsemen, yet their gestures and the way in which they charged told that they were attacking someone. And who else could that someone be but Guy—official interpreter to the armoured-car detachment?

As the handy-men sprang into the cars, or set their engines going and took up their regular stations, the Lieutenant and Jo stood there—rooted to the spot—fear knocking at the hearts of both of them.

“He’ll go down,” the Lieutenant growled.

“He’ll—he’s knocked out another of ’em,” shouted Jo. “And, why! There he is, on the right, sir! You can see his head rising up above the boulders just beyond the top of the pass—he’s standing up to the last two of them and is preparing for close quarters.”

Yes, Guy was indeed preparing for close quarters, and for a strenuous encounter with the two remaining Kurds about to attack him. As steady as a rock, once he had appreciated his danger and the importance of beating these enemies—for otherwise his comrades

90 The Armoured-car Scouts

down below might be taken unawares and attacked by other Kurd horsemen—he had held his rifle with such steady hands that, in spite of the pace with which these men rushed at him, he had bowled three of them over, which, with the one he had knocked down at an earlier stage, left only two to be encountered. Only two! Yet see that one in advance—that huge fellow, a bearded giant—rushing upon him with a fearsome curved weapon—a man whose appearance alone, without the sight of the arm he carried, would be sufficient to unnerve most people. Possessed of a bushy head of hair, and of a black beard which covered his face so completely that it seemed that only his eyes and his mouth were visible, he disclosed a set of clenched teeth as he came nearer, and eyes which flashed their hatred of his as yet unseen enemy. That this fellow would fight to the death, that nothing in fact but death would stop him, was obvious; while, supposing he arrived at the lair which Guy occupied, death must inevitably come to our hero.

“It’s me, or it’s him,” said Guy, his lips tightly closed, his eyes and hands still steady. “Better, now that they know where I am, and are coming too fast to use their rifles, better to get out of this hollow and make sure of free movement. Ah! How’s that? Here’s a rock behind which I can stand and still fire at them.”

Those comrades of his down below, watching this

intensely dramatic scene on the summit of the mountain, saw Guy suddenly leap backward from the hollow in the boulders which had previously hidden him, and watched him dart towards them, running with speed, and in a direction which for a while took him away from those two Kurds bearing down so relentlessly upon him. Then they saw him suddenly halt behind a rock and face about, while at the same time they watched the Kurds swerve to their right, brandishing their weapons with even greater movement, and come on again. Yes, it was a breathless moment, and no wonder that Jo gave vent to a shout of triumph as Guy, laying the barrel of his rifle on the rock which gave him shelter, fired and brought down the giant. Yet a moment later all his fears returned again, and he stood there holding his glasses now with one hand, and gripping the mudguard of the car with the other with fingers which almost bent the metal; for that last surviving Kurd, tossing his rifle aside when within a yard of the rock, flung himself upon our hero.

They went down, and for a moment or so were invisible; then up they rose again. Through glasses, those anxious eyes down below watched as the two swayed and wriggled and lurched out on to the track which climbed over the top of the pass; then they saw them separate again and halt for a while—glaring at one another, drawing in their breath and making

ready for the final encounter. Even as Jo was groaning at the sight, bemoaning his fate that he was down there in the hollow and was not beside our hero to support him, the two rushed at one another again, and once more, with arms and legs locked together, fell prostrate.

How long that final struggle lasted, how long the Lieutenant and Jo watched with staring eyes a struggle which they deemed unequal, neither could say, nor, indeed, could anybody. It was perhaps a full minute; to Jo it felt like an eternity, while to Guy himself it was the busiest period in the whole of his existence—not even excepting that time when, thanks to the act of a German submarine, he had been flung into the ocean. For this Kurd fought with hands, and feet, and teeth, in every sort of manner; once indeed he contrived to grip Guy's wrist between those powerful teeth of his, so that the pain was excruciating, and Guy himself was helpless; yet the pain awakened his full strength and energy—if they can be said to have been previously deficient—and, with a sudden movement, Guy dashed his fist in the fellow's face and forced him to relinquish the grip. Then he seized the man by the throat, only to be flung off a second later, and once more to be seized by the Kurd, who in his turn made every effort to strangle his opponent. Then a lucky chance, a lucky thought, permitted Guy to feel for his revolver—for everyone

of the armoured-car detachment was armed with a service weapon—his hand lit upon the pouch, his fingers tore it open, and in a flash he had a grip of the weapon. Yet the Kurd, divining his intention, held him now so firmly that he could not move his arm, and could not present the revolver. So they lay, and rolled, and kicked, and squirmed for some few seconds, till Guy, rendered desperate by the knowledge that his strength was now rapidly ebbing, suddenly butted his head against the man's chin, and drove his skull backward against the track on which he was lying. Then, forcing his arm free, he dashed the muzzle forward and pulled the trigger.

"He's done for!" growled Jo, perspiring at every pore, grinding his teeth, and staring through his glasses with eyes which were actually protruding from his head.

"He's not! He's done the fellow in! He's getting up! The young—the young—ruffian!" shouted the Lieutenant. "Look at him! He's killed his man and is now returning to his bicycle."

Jo gave vent to a whoop of triumph.

"S'welp me!" he shouted; "so he has. The young shaver! Done his man in, and in fine style too! And that makes six of 'em—six solid Huns, sir!"

"Turks, or, rather, Kurds, you mean," came the answer. "Look at him now. He's almost reached his machine, and will soon be back with us."

To arrive at the point where he had left his motor-bicycle was not quite the easy progress which the Lieutenant's words seemed to indicate; for Guy, shaken by the terrific struggle which had but just now ended, and by the adventure through which he had passed, felt as though his legs would hardly carry him, and, indeed, staggered over the boulder-strewn track, and, reaching his bicycle, leant for a while on it. But not for long; for if he thought that he had finally ended with adventure for that early afternoon, and could return at his ease and at his leisure, having recovered from the excitement of it all, he was very much mistaken. The howl which Jo gave, the roar which the Lieutenant allowed himself to give vent to, and the bellow of warning which the men of the detachment down below set up, might, one would almost imagine, have reached him, so loud were the shouts.

From down below there in the hollow, with the sun now higher in the heavens, and casting its rays full upon the track as it crossed the top of the pass, the sky-line was so clearly illuminated that every speck on it, every boulder of fair size, was visible even to the naked eye of those who stared in that direction. More than that, in addition to the landscape, the figure of a man, for instance, was bound, as it appeared above that sky-line, instantly to attract attention. Now, as the party down below watched, their

hearts still in their mouths—for they feared that the young scout whom they had sent forward would certainly be annihilated—they saw a figure spur his horse up from the reverse side of the pass and pull the beast in absolutely on the sky-line. So silhouetted was this man's figure against the clear sky beyond, and so well were the limbs of his horse sketched in that position, that none could fail to see them. It was then that those shouts had arisen, and were increased, if that were possible, a few moments later, when, at the call of the Kurd who had suddenly put in his appearance, other heads were seen rising up above the sky-line in answer to his shriek and frantic beckonings.

Had Guy heard them? Had he seen them? Was he as yet unaware of this new danger which threatened him, and which, indeed, seemed almost certain to be his undoing?

“Why don't he turn round? Why don't he bolt? What's the young idiot doing?” growled the Lieutenant. “He'll be caught of a certainty if he doesn't get away at once, and even then they'd shoot him down.”

He shouted an order, standing up in the leading car in which he had his post, and, beckoning to the drivers of the cars which followed, at once set the little section of this British armoured-car detachment in motion, and led the way along the road which Guy had followed.

96 The Armoured-car Scouts

As for Guy, a more startled individual than he could not have been discovered. True, the experience he had already had, the lively little battle into which he had entered, and the knowledge that he had been wonderfully fortunate and successful had so steadied his nerves that a further alarm, the sight of more enemies, did not distress him so much or startle him so greatly as had the sudden discovery of that first party of Kurds as he topped the pass. But if he were not quite so startled on this occasion, he was yet conscious of the fact that only instant movement on his part could save him.

"Seventy yards away, not more," he told himself, bracing his muscles for another encounter, and swinging the bicycle off its stand, which he kicked into its clip a second later. "Got to run for it, and chance their bullets, that's all; though it's a good chance, I should say, for they're sure to gallop after me. Lucky it ain't uphill, for I've still got to get the engine started."

Throwing in his first gear, he ran beside the bicycle, and, dodging in amongst the boulders, suddenly heard the engine start, and felt the machine pulling away from him. It wanted no little agility and skill then to leap into the saddle; and the swerve which our hero gave caused Jo's heart down below to sicken and the Lieutenant to shut his eyes for just one moment and to mutter; but when he looked again,

that scout of his on the bicycle was charging madly down towards him, while behind, now over the top of the pass and spurring down through the boulders, were perhaps a dozen Kurds, their rifles mostly held over their heads, though some of them were firing from the saddle.

As for Guy, he turned his head once or twice to look at his pursuers, and then settled down for a journey which he knew was likely to prove disastrous; for the machine was now going at a tremendous pace, urged on by a busy engine, and it wanted all his strength, all his grit, every faculty, to escape many objects which threatened to upset him.

Once, on his mad rush downwards, he crossed a gully where water cut deeply across the track in rainy weather, and had delved a channel some fifteen inches deep. Yes, Guy remembered the bump it had given him on his way upwards, when he was going at quite a moderate speed, and now, fearing it would wreck him, he gripped his machine between his knees, held on to the handles, and hoped for the best. Bang! The front wheel crossed the channel so swiftly that it barely bumped on the lower lip, but the back, with more weight over it, hit that farther lip with a blow which sent the bicycle leaping upwards and almost threw it over. With a wriggle and a gulp and a violent contortion, Guy pulled it into a straight course and regained his equilibrium; and then,

98 The Armoured-car Scouts

swooping round a boulder and steering between two rocks, shot on towards safety.

"Halt! Prepare for action! Let two of the cars come out on either side of me," shouted the Lieutenant, finding that the road just there was in good condition, and that on either side the ground was hard and unobstructed, and would allow his machines to manœuvre.

Indeed, just there, had they wished, the ground was so open and so level that the detachment could have driven its cars in a circle round and round, ready to make off back towards the city of Erzerum, or prepare, if it seemed wiser to do so, to rush up the pass in pursuit of the enemy then charging down after our hero.

Ten—twenty—they counted seventy of them as they came over the sky-line—seventy of those wild-looking Kurds, all well mounted, all spurring up over the pass and taking the road downwards. They could hear the reports of their rifles now, and even their shouts, for the high ground on either side of the road imprisoned the sounds as it were, and directed them downwards. And already the busy rattle and bang of Guy's engine was audible, as he came plunging and bumping and swerving down the hill towards them. Lucky indeed was it for him that the Lieutenant had moved his cavalcade of cars forward, for, contriving to ride swiftly down the worst and steepest

part of the mountain-side, Guy got into difficulties towards the bottom, and, cannoning against a rock, went swerving off the road, and, regaining it by a desperate effort, crashed into another of those channels cut by water flowing across the road. Bang! He went up in the air like a rocket, and fell far from his machine, which was wrecked against a boulder.

"Run! Run for it!" shouted Jo, at his post in one of the cars. "Run for it, young shaver!"

The Lieutenant stood up and once more beckoned.

"Move forward, men," he ordered; "the ground is quite clear on either side of the road for three hundred yards or more, for I have looked it over carefully with my glasses. Move forward to meet him."

It was thanks to this movement, and thanks to the speed with which he ran, and to the start which his motor-bicycle had given him, that Guy was able to keep well ahead of his pursuers; and, heedless of the bullets which some still fired at him, managed at length to reach his friends. An armoured door was swung open in the side of the car which was leading—the one in which the Lieutenant was seated—and through it Guy crept in an instant. It banged to after him, was latched by one of the men, while another brawny individual grabbed the new arrival and dragged him into the turret.

"Just you sit down there and get your breath!" he growled, taking his post once more at the breach of

100 The Armoured-car Scouts

the machine-gun. "No, yer don't! No, yer don't!" he shouted, as Guy, eager to see the Kurds who had been racing after him, stood up and attempted to look out over the lip of the turret. "None o' that, me boy, for you may get in the way and spoil my business. You sit down till you're steady again, then you can get busy with your rifle."

There was silence now amongst the crews of those armoured cars, whilst the engines purred ever so gently under their bodies, and every man stood watching and waiting, eager, it is true, to enter into the conflict with the horsemen now galloping closer every second, and yet, obedient to the orders of their officer, trusting absolutely in him, knowing well from previous experience that they might rely on his judgment. And thus they waited, watching as the calvacade, now opening out as it reached the arena in which the cars had halted, swept in a mad rush at them, divided when within a few feet of the cars, and swept on recklessly, the men in many cases holding their rifles out at arm's length and firing at point-blank range at these strange-looking monsters.

"Follow in line," shouted the Lieutenant as the last of the Kurds went galloping past. "We'll circle round in this open space and keep them from returning. If they charge, open on them with your guns; but keep moving."

Eyes went to the sights of machine-guns and rifles,

men gripped the breech-handles of the former, while the drivers engaged their lowest gears, and, letting in their clutches, followed the Lieutenant's car, left the track and drove out into the open. As they did so, the Kurds checked their impetuous rush and pulled up their horses. They could be seen for awhile, as the cars continued circling, grouped closed together, perhaps three hundred yards away, breathing their horses, shouting and gesticulating. For, indeed, the monsters which they saw circling down there about the road were enough to cause these wild horsemen in the heart of Turkey astonishment and even more.

"Never in my life before have I seen such things—such carts!" shouted one of the Kurds, whose gaudy apparel seemed to indicate that he was their leader. What, then, are these? Is there one amongst us who has ever set eyes on their like, or can tell us what they are and what we have to fear from them?"

A man galloped his horse forward, dropped the butt of his rifle on his thigh, and saluted.

"Chief," he said, "I have heard of these strange things before—carts which travel in some mysterious way without beasts before them, and which, protected by a skin of metal, hide enemies from us. The soldiers of Russia, whom we are fighting, had them in Muscovy. I heard of them from a friend who had travelled there, or, rather, who had been in Europe. They carry guns like the ships on the Black Sea, and

we were well advised to take heed of them, and perhaps to leave them."

"Leave them!" The chief frowned on this man, and looked at him in threatening manner. "Leave them!" he blazed, shaking a fist at the circling cars and inspecting each one of them closely. "Ride off because we fear these things — these ugly carts in which you say men are hiding? Of a truth we know that men must be within them, for how else could they move, seeing that there are no beasts to haul them over the ground. So there are men within, my comrades, men who are enemies, men who have invaded our country, and whom we must kill. Is not that the will—nay, the command—of the Sultan?"

They raised a shout at that. His followers, one and all, spurred their animals forward till there was a block of mounted men all round this fierce and gallant-looking chief, men whose faces were aflame with passion, who glanced over their shoulders at those circling cars—those cars which looked so strange and so helpless, and which they knew must contain enemies. Why, then, should they hesitate? Why, then, seeing that these men must lie at their mercy, should they halt an instant? For was it not their duty to slay each and every one of them?"

"Lead us!" they yelled at the top of their voices.

But, wait. A young man, dressed in more elaborate costume than his fellows, but yet not so gaudily

arrayed as the chief, a handsome, gallant-looking figure, spurred through the throng, elbowing his way, and, entering a path nearer the centre, he shouted and silenced the throng, while he looked at the chief with eyes which were simply blazing.

“Chief, divide us now before we enter into combat, and before we are victorious; divide us into groups—one for each of those strange carts—so that there may be no quarrelling as to the booty. Then let each group gallop forward, and may Allah give to all a reward worthy of this day’s doings.”

It was a case indeed of counting their chickens before they were hatched, and had these wild horsemen—these children of the deserts and plains of Turkey—but been able to glance within those cars, those seemingly helpless and innocent cars still circling out there in the open, could they have seen the handy-men, grim, silent, standing at the breeches of their rifles and machine-guns, perhaps they would have hesitated awhile, and, in any case, would have been less certain of the issue. But they knew nothing of them, reckoned that those crews would be as helpless as children, and made for conquest. Thinking to slay their enemies with ease, and without danger to themselves, the Kurds broke rapidly into groups at the order of their chief, and then with one long shout of triumph galloped forward.

CHAPTER VI

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen

WHAT a scene would have been presented to any on-looker perched upon the steeply rising sides of the gully in which that small section of the British naval armoured-car detachment circled, and towards which those groups of wild Kurdish horsemen were now galloping with furious energy! In a measure each of the combatants may be said to have looked as uncouth and as incongruous as was possible; the Kurds themselves appearing to the handy-men behind the hardened steel, which gave them protection, as unlike anything they had ever dreamed of or seen before as could be well conceived—looking indeed like what they were, like wild, dishevelled, fanatic horsemen. As to those armoured cars—for seeing that the drivers and the defenders within them were hidden from view, it was the cars themselves, and only those curious cars that could be seen by the Kurds—they were indeed a strange mystery in the eyes of the denizens of this Turkish country. For what man amongst the Kurds, save that one who had

already addressed the leader of this party of cavalry, had ever heard of such curious machines before? And what one amongst them could imagine the motive power which caused the vehicles to roll so smoothly and so silently forward? How were they controlled? How was it that at a whistle which emanated from the leading vehicle the whole party came to a halt? And how did it happen that, as the Kurds broke into that frantic gallop, the circle of cars broke up, and the one which had been leading steered straight towards the advancing horsemen, while the others trailed off in rear till they presented a straight line, advancing one behind the other?

“Halt!” It caused the chief leading those frantic groups to throw a hand in the air, and then to toss his rifle above his head—a signal which, despite the eagerness of all, brought the cavalcade to a stop. Then:

“What means this?” he asked, beckoning the young elegant who had so recently addressed him. “What means this strange movement? For see, while before, as we galloped down from the pass, these strange carts that roll along on wheels which are smaller yet broader than those we use, and which make no sound and no clatter, were circling about the road with none to say who drew them, or what strange animals caused them to move onward, now see how they have turned towards us, presenting but one only

at their head. Halt! Let us ride away a little and consider the matter."

"Ride away a little and talk? Expend our strength in words—in mere breath?" cried the young man—that young elegant—spurring his horse forward, and snorting his indignation. "Waste breath at such a time? When these carts, or whatever you might please to call them, lie out in the open—at our mercy? Of a truth this is madness!"

For awhile—for perhaps twenty seconds—the two men—the chief and this young and insubordinate officer—regarded one another fiercely; the younger man blazing with indignation and impatience, the elder man, with flashing eyes, but with otherwise calm demeanour. Indeed, we must admit the fact that this wild chieftain presented a noble appearance, and the manner in which he was mounted, his gaudy yet extremely picturesque raiment, his whole turn-out, and the manner in which he sat his horse accentuated that noble appearance. Slowly the fire in his eyes died out, and very slowly he lowered the muzzle of his rifle—the butt of which he had rested on his thigh up to that moment. Presently the butt was at his shoulder, and the muzzle itself was directed at the head of the man who had dared to oppose his orders.

"Tell me, men," he said, and spoke quite calmly, "tell me: when the men of our nation go to war, and one is placed in command of them, what then is the

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 107

fortune of him—that stupid one, that madman—who dares to gainsay him? It is death, is it not?”

There were agitated whispers amongst those wild horsemen seated about the chieftain—seated on horses every whit as well-bred as his, while each man had as fine a seat as had his leader; magnificent-looking men they were, if wild, and one would have said that for dash and for courage they were not to be beaten. Doubtless, too, they had been brought up in as strict a school as could be found even in military circles in Germany. Doubtless, in their part of the world, and in the army to which they belonged, an order was an order, discipline was a thing to be observed whatever happened, and insubordination—mutiny—on the part of the men was a crime worthy of the severest punishment—a crime, in fact, to be suppressed instantly, and in such a manner as to deter all others. Those whispers amongst the men increased, and mutterings at length could be heard from many of their number, though none had ventured up to this moment to answer aloud the question addressed to them. And meanwhile that bold young fellow—that finely dressed Kurd who had raised this commotion, and whose fiery insubordination, whose perhaps legitimate impatience, had incurred the anger of his chieftain, that young fellow—as perfect a specimen of Kurdish manhood as could be seen, a horseman to attract the covetous eyes of any cavalry leader, sat his mount—a magnificent

bay—motionless, his fiery eyes still fixed upon his leader, not a tremor about his limbs, not wincing an atom as the muzzle of that levelled rifle rested on the centre of his forehead. Even a smile at length parted his lips and lit up his dark, swarthy face till it was handsome.

“Wait once more, Chief,” he called out, “and you, my comrades. A question has been asked of you—a question the justice of which I admit instantly. I was wrong. In my heat and my anxiety to get to close quarters with this enemy I forgot who I was—forgot the noble chieftain who sits now in justice before me. Let me then give the answer. What is the reward for one who thwarts the orders, disobeys the rightful commands, of a leader? That was the question. Comrades, and you, O Chief, the reward is death. Shoot, then, and let justice be rendered.”

He dropped the reins on the neck of his horse, and separated the folds of his tunic where they crossed his breast, his eyes all the while fixed upon the chief; then, with his chest bared, his demeanour still unflinching, he called again loudly upon the chief to pull his trigger, and, holding the folds of his tunic still asunder with one hand, pointed, as if indicating the exact spot at which the bullet that was to deprive him of his life should be directed.

It was indeed a dramatic moment, yet not so dramatic having regard to the wild audience which looked

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 109

on at the scene—for matters of life and death were of little moment to these Kurd horsemen. But to the Lieutenant, to the garrulous Jo, to Guy—still breathless after that dash down from the top of the pass and his struggle at the summit—the scene was indeed extraordinarily uncanny. With glasses fixed upon the horsemen, and his cars now stopped, the Lieutenant could see every movement, could distinguish even the intimate details of the faces of those horsemen, and, as he watched, could not fail to understand a great deal of what was passing. He stood there, his feet wide apart, his glasses resting on the edge of the slit-like aperture which allowed him to look out into the open, and felt his hair almost rise at the scene that he was watching. Then he gave an exclamation of relief; for, indeed, it was with a feeling of relief that he saw the chief suddenly lift the muzzle of his rifle, spur his horse forward, and embrace that gallant young horseman.

“Thus do I reward the fiery and gallant impetuosity of the youth of our tribe,” he cried, pulling his horse back and regarding the young tribesman. “Listen, my men. To one who disobeys when on the war-path, death is but a just reward; yet there are occasions when death may be too stern a penalty, when by carrying out such a sentence one may deprive our troops of more than an erring soldier. As Allah lives, did ever one see a bolder man than this, or

one who faced a rifle in firmer manner, or invited death with better courage? Thus, did I execute our comrade, we—you and I, his brothers—would have lost one who will one day be a gallant chieftain.”

They cheered at that, sending up shrill, uncouth cheers, which caused the Lieutenant to drop his glasses, and caused many a handy-man within those armoured cars to peer out inquisitively at them. They watched as the horsemen trickled away along the road at a smart canter, and stayed there in single file awaiting developments, and wondering what was to happen.

“Looks as if they’d given up the show,” said Guy, now recovering fast after his exertions, and able to speak without spluttering. “My word! Didn’t they charge down on us?”

“Forward!” commanded the Lieutenant. “We’ll circle round again, and keep moving, just to show that we’ve got life in us. Don’t you be afraid of their leaving us alone, for that isn’t the nature of these Kurdish horsemen; they’ve gone off to consult. In a moment or two, when I’ve had time to think the matter out, I propose to alter their deliberations.”

Perhaps five minutes later, when the horsemen had ridden away a quarter of a mile, and had pulled up their horses, and had once more surrounded their chieftain, the Lieutenant gave an order to gain the

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 111

road again, and led the small detachment at a smart pace towards the enemy.

"That's bound to wake 'em up—eh?" he asked, turning and smiling at Guy.

"What are they doing, sir?" the latter responded, standing on tiptoe and peering out beneath the lip of the cover of this quaint turret fitted to the motor. "See! they are sending out a couple of men on either flank, and are again bunching into groups—one—two—three—why, there are as many groups as there are cars here; that makes it look as if they intended to tackle each car separately."

"I believe you," smiled the Lieutenant, and chuckled. "'Pon my word!" he went on, still watching the horsemen and their manœuvres; "they're the prettiest lot of fellows that I've set eyes on for many a long day, and it really does seem a pity that fellows like you and me—peaceful sort of beggars, eh?—should want to fight these Kurds. But, there, I expect their appearance is about the only pleasant part about them."

As a matter of fact, the Lieutenant was not very far from the truth in making that statement, for though these Kurds who had galloped so furiously after Guy were a handsome, even romantic-looking, band of cavalry, yet they came of a fierce, relentless, cruel tribe, between whom and the Russians little mercy was shown, while there were frequent and bitter meet-

ings. It needed no warning indeed on the part of the more experienced Russians to inform the Lieutenant that if one of his cars were wrecked—if, for instance, their ammunition gave out, not one of its crew would survive; for it would be deemed a noble thing on the part of this chieftain and his men to slit the throats of every Briton. Yes, gallant, magnificent almost, though their appearance might be, at heart these tribesmen were but savages. As for those two horsemen sent off to either flank, they soon showed for what purpose they had been dispatched; for, putting spurs to the sides of their horses, they went off at a mad gallop which rapidly took them across the lower ground, and so up the sides of the ridge over which the pass, which Guy had climbed, struggled. And now, as the cavalcade of cars was brought to a sudden halt while the Lieutenant deliberated, the four horsemen separated widely, and, all perched on the very sky-line, could be seen standing in their stirrups, waving their arms, and signalling in a manner which was evidently prearranged and understood by their comrades; for the groups into which the Kurdish cavalry had broken stood fast without a move, evidently waiting.

“Waiting for reinforcements, sir!” Jo ventured, as the mariner cast a wary eye at each of the groups in turn, and then glanced up at the ridge on which those four figures were silhouetted. “Means that we

shall soon have a crowd of these cut-throats comin' up over the pass, and shall be cut between two lots of 'em."

"Ha!" the Lieutenant smiled grimly. "Then at last we shall have a chance of showing what armoured cars can do—eh?" he laughed. "By the way, Guy, what are the chances of these cars climbing the pass, supposing we have a wish to do so?"

"Can't be done, sir. Out of the question," came the prompt answer. "If we were to send a party ahead to clear some of the boulders, I have no doubt you would manage to get up; but, as it is, it was a job here and there to squeeze a bicycle through the obstacles. But you're not thinking of——?"

The Lieutenant interrupted him with a shout of laughter.

"Thinking of bolting—eh? Not much, Guy," he cried; "but, to be candid, I was wondering what chances there would be of pursuing these fellows. Bolting—eh? Why, I'm just holding on here and waiting for numbers to be more even. I've been counting and calculating, and I make out that there are perhaps sixty or seventy of those beggars."

"Sixty-nine, sir!" came from Jo; "I've counted 'em all over."

"Then sixty-nine! What's sixty-nine?" demanded the Lieutenant.

"Two and a bit to one of this party, sir," Jo re-

(0 800)

8

sponded. "Biggish odds, but nothing when you come to think of the fact that we're in these 'ere meat-cages."

It rapidly became known to every member of the gallant little band manning the armoured cars of the detachment that the Lieutenant was determined to lead them into as brilliant an action as he could discover. It just fitted in with their own sporting instinct, the instinct which carries every British soldier and sailor into action, that their commander should not bear down directly upon those horsemen who, in spite of their own inward consciousness of power, were yet particularly vulnerable to the machine-guns in the armoured cars, but should halt where he was, waiting till reinforcements reached the enemy, and until there should enter into the coming conflict an element of real danger to the British party. It was a Quixotic idea, no doubt, yet truly British, and met with the hearty approval of every handy-man present.

"It 'ud be just like bloomin' murder, that would," growled the brawny individual who stood gripping his machine-gun so close to Guy. "See 'ere; I've got me sights lined on one o' them groups, and if I was just to tap this little beauty she'd bowl the whole lot over. It's war, you might say; yet it ain't war. Now, if them groups was just to break up and be joined by others, and we'd a 'undred or more of them cut-throats galloping and charging at us, why,

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 115

there 'ud be something different in it—a chap would have to do something more than touch his gun, he'd want to do more—and then there's many o' those horsemen who'd get up to close quarters till they was at boardin' distance, and that 'ud be fightin'."

"Yes," chimed in Jo. "Fighting, you bet! And there 'ud be bullets spluttering and peppering all round us; besides—besides, Tom—what 'ud the folks say back at Erzerum—our mates, what 'ud have given their ears, to say nothing of their boots and other things, to be along o' this party—what 'ud they say if we came back this blessed night and just reported that we'd scuppered sixty Kurds who couldn't help being scuppered? Some of us boys has got to show knocks after we've been in action; and if only the mates of these 'ere horsemen will hurry up, why, some of us will be gettin' what we've asked for."

Guy interrupted the flow of words between these two garrulous spokesmen, and suddenly pointed:

"There's what you asked for," he cried, drawing their attention to figures now appearing on the ridge which overshadowed the hollow. "You asked for numbers, Jo; well, there are plenty of 'em coming down upon us."

A glance up at the ridge might well have caused the Lieutenant to repent of his dilatory action, and to wish that he had pushed on along the road and dispersed the Kurds who had first come down to attack

him, for now the hill above was black with horsemen—with men as fine as those now grouped down in the hollow, perhaps a quarter of a mile from the armoured-car detachment—black with Kurdish cavalry loping their way over the top of the ridge and down across green slopes and amongst the boulders towards the plain where were their brothers. And very soon, as the Lieutenant gave a sharp order, and set the cars in motion, causing them once more to circle round and round on that broad stretch of ground which swept smoothly on either side of the road, and made manœuvring easy, the Kurds dropped from the heights, and spread themselves out till an almost unbroken line faced inwards, forming, as it were, the rim of a wheel, the hub of which was made up of those circling British cars.

“Enveloping tactics,” growled the Lieutenant, a little disconcerted by this sudden accession to the forces of the enemy. “Looks to me as though they were going to draw in closer, and then rush us. Well, we must ourselves alter our tactics to meet ’em.”

It was not for nothing that the armoured-car detachment had practised before it left England, and had carried out manœuvres of every sort and description since it arrived in Russia and the Caucasus. Long since, it had developed the custom of proceeding to its destination for all the world like a cavalry regiment—with its advance-guards well out in front, and

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 117

as often as not composed of a couple of speedy motor-cycles, with flanking guards where the existence of roads made it possible, and in every case with a rear-guard—a reserve of armoured motor-cars or bicycles, which could, at a signal from the commander, be swept in any direction, and could be rushed up to support any portion of the force threatened by disaster. Amongst the manœuvres, too, was one which took the cars in two parallel lines, till at a signal the lines wheeled outwards and returned upon their tracks, thus going up and down without cessation. Yet another caused the drivers, at a shrill whistle, to steer their cars into line and advance on some objective with a space between cars of fifty feet or more, thus giving a free firing-range to everyone of the gunners; another shrill whistle, when the cars had accomplished the distance determined upon by their commander, directing each to turn about, steer to the right or left, as had been arranged, and once more take up the same order, though proceeding in the opposite direction. Here, then, was a wide stretch of open, unbroken and unobstructed ground, which gave peculiar opportunity for such a manœuvre; and, promptly realizing that he must develop some sort of tactical movement different from that which he had previously followed, the Lieutenant passed the command to each armoured car in succession, and, sounding his whistle, suddenly caused all to come up into

118 The Armoured-car Scouts

line, breaking away from the hub of that circle of Kurdish horsemen—a circle becoming now far more sinister in appearance.

This sudden and unexpected change in the movements of these strange vehicles, so little understood by the enemy, precipitated their own action, for already it had been arranged that the men should advance slowly and steadily till the chieftain fired his rifle, when every alternate man was to gallop forward, while the remainder halted and prepared to cut off any of the survivors who might not have fallen to the weapons of their comrades.

A shout burst from the chief as he saw the cars change direction. Then, suddenly fearful that they would burst their way through one side of his encircling horsemen, he pulled his trigger, and, clapping spurs to his mount, led the way forward. Almost instantly a yell burst from those three hundred and more horsemen, while half their number shot forward and came galloping down upon the sailors.

“Open fire!” shouted the Lieutenant.

“Open fire!” repeated the petty officers commanding each one of the vehicles, and at once a splutter of musketry burst from the apertures of the turrets.

“Rat-a-tat-tat!” went the machine-guns. “Crash!” went the individual rifles; and then there was silence for awhile amongst the British, though from the mouths of the Kurds there came yells of defiance, and shots

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 119

were fired from perhaps a hundred rifles, while bullets swept across that open space, often enough striking the steel sides of those "meat safes", as Jo was wont to call them, and ricochetting from the hard surface. One, however, found entrance through the aperture in the turret in which Guy was riding, and it gave him quite a little start as he felt rather than heard it buzz past his ears and flatten itself on the interior.

"And quite near enough, too, for anyone's liking," the mariner who was manning the machine-gun gurgled, seeing Guy duck. "No, you ain't got no cause to mind about ducking, lad, 'cause there's heaps of us does it. You can't help it; and, besides, it's a wise man who can save his own skin and be left for more fighting. Bizz! That's got somebody."

Carefully sighting his gun and traversing the ground in front of the path which the car was following, he caused the muzzle to spit forth a stream of bullets, which laid more than one of the enemy low, and sent perhaps half a dozen of them fleeing. But let it not be imagined that the sudden burst of firing from the strange vehicles upon which the Kurds were advancing had in any way deterred them or damped their courage; a fight, after all, was just as much to the liking of these fierce horsemen as to the gallant handy-men of the armoured-car detachment. They shouted at the pitch of their lungs, while those whose horses had been hit, and who perforce were being

dragged away from the conflict, buried their spurs deep in their unfortunate mounts and strove to rejoin their comrades. As for the latter, they came on faster than ever now, and, meeting the cars, turned and galloped beside them, firing from the saddle, one or two almost getting in the way and arresting the progress of the armoured cars, and not a few measuring their length on the ground as the Lieutenant's men fired on them. Then the whistle sounded shrilly, and at once, in a manner utterly uncanny and inexplicable to the Kurds, the cars turned to their left and their right, circled round, and began to run off in the opposite direction. That caused an even louder shout to burst from the throats of these wild tribesmen. They dashed after the vehicles, and, finding bullets of no avail, and indeed as yet having seen none of their enemies, or having only caught glimpses of faces through the slots left open in the steel armour of the cars, they hammered with the butts of their rifles on the bodies, and then, drawing their scimitars, slashed vainly at the hard cuticle of these strangest of all enemies.

A yell of fury burst from the throat of the gallant chieftain as the blade of his scimitar—a keen, curving blade which was wont to cleave whatever it was aimed at—was shattered into splinters as it met the hide of one of these, to him, mysterious vehicles.

“Allah!” he shouted; “what is this? What strange

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 121

thing has happened? Charge the carts, my comrades! Charge them! And if we cannot drive holes through them with our bullets, or come at the occupants with our scimitars, then let us turn the things over and wreck them."

It was a plan easier to conceive by far than to carry out, as these wild Kurdish tribesmen were to discover; for, if the appearance of the armoured cars was foreign to them, utterly strange and beyond their comprehension, if the motive power was altogether beyond their ken and outside their experience and knowledge, the weight of these strange juggernauts was a matter surpassing all other points, so great was it. It mattered not how these Kurds flung themselves at the carts, as the Lieutenant, cool as any icicle, his keen eyes watchful through the slit below the turret, blew his whistle, causing the cars to steer outward again so as to return on the same route. It mattered not at all whether one or a dozen of those horsemen, catching up the cars and finding them broadside-on, sent their horses pell-mell at them, riding the frantic beasts sheer against the steel walls and causing them to shake with their efforts; for of damage to the occupants there was none, while not one single armoured car flinched from the ordeal, or showed even so much as a dent after this impact. True, one off-wheel tyre, already damaged by a sharp flint over which it had run, succumbed to the ordeal, and went off with a

sharp report, badly scaring the Kurds in that neighbourhood; but that too made no difference. The little detachment of cars, looking so forlorn, yet so formidable for all that, amongst these hundreds of Kurds, ran on, circled back on their tracks, pursued the same course and once more returned, opening fire here and there, sending sharp volleys when the tribesmen gathered, and ignoring their futile efforts at attack.

“Time, I think, to put them all to flight and be done with fighting!” cried the Lieutenant, seeing that the mad charges of the enemy were lessening. “After all, we don’t want to murder the poor brutes, but to teach them a lesson. We’ll break up this party a little and form into convoys.”

See, then, the detachment broken up into three convoys of two cars, parading that wide area of open ground, circling here and twisting there, independently of one another, running up inquisitively whenever the Kurds bunched together, and breaking those bunches with a smart splutter of musketry.

A little more, and a species of rout set in amongst the horsemen. Some, scared by the want of success of their comrades, bolted, while others drew rein and sat there desperate, shaking their fists at the curious monsters which spouted flame and bullets at them. It wanted only a lucky shot on the part of one of the handy-men to bring down that proud chieftain, and, with a howl of rage and disappointment, the

Attacked by Kurdish Horsemen 123

band turned tail and went galloping up the pass and over the ridge beyond which Guy had scouted. Then the cars fell into line once more, while those who had commanded two of the three sections reported operations and the results of their work to the Lieutenant.

"Any casualties?" demanded the latter, lifting the steel hood above his head so as to have a clear view all about him.

"None," came from one of the sections.

"Two here," came from the other. "Only pin-pricks, sir; nothing to be alarmed at."

"And here?" demanded the Lieutenant, turning to his own little section of two cars which led the line.

"None," growled the brawny mariner, answering for those in the leading car. "None!" came from the one behind it.

"Whoa! Go astern there!" shouted Jo, looking indignantly at the man who had answered for those in the leading car. "What's this? Look 'ere, sir! Take a view of our interpreter!"

They looked, and then for the first time, so great had been the movement and the excitement of the action through which they had been passing, discovered that Guy, without a word, without so much as a cry or a sigh, had sunk to the ground and was sitting wedged in the far corner. But if he were wounded, as seemed most certainly the case, for blood dripped from his forehead, he was, as Jo described

124 The Armoured-car Scouts

it, "merry and bright as ever", and smiled back at them.

"Nothing much, sir! Nothing to mind about at all," he sang out brightly.

A bandage neatly applied, and with much skill, by the garrulous Jo, and a helpful arm tucked round our hero, did all that was wanted for the moment; then the Lieutenant's whistle sounded, the cars got going again, and some hours later hummed their way triumphantly up the steep roads leading to the plateau above, and so into the captured city of Erzerum. It had been a smart little brush, that action with the Kurdish tribesmen, and the handy-men came back to their comrades jubilant and eager for more fighting.

CHAPTER VII

Behind the Turkish Lines

SPRING had come in all the fulness of its bounteous tide to the lower Caucasus, and the plains overlooked by Erzerum and the upper Armenian plateau, almost before Guy and his friends of the naval armoured-car detachment had settled down to their surroundings. Not, indeed, that it takes the handy-man or his officer, or, for that matter, the British soldier, long to settle down in any surroundings, however uncouth, however unexpected, and however strange; for without doubt they are adepts at making themselves comfortable, and at the same time of making the best of any sort of circumstance.

Spring had come, as we have said, and down below there, in Lower Armenia, the valleys and lower hills were green—vividly green—trees were in full leaf, and the air was balmy and summer-like, but above, in Upper Armenia, round about Erzerum, and in particular behind that city, where the Caucasian mountains uplifted their summits towards the sky, more wintry conditions still prevailed in the higher portions, and there was snow on many a peak.

“They are our barometers, those peaks, and this dressing of snow,” said a Russian officer one day to Guy as the two met and saluted. “Mark, now, there where I point, it is but six weeks ago that the whole mountain-side was white from the pinnacle right down to the base. A month passed and green fields swept upwards half-way to the summit, while a week later only the peak retained its covering during the day, though at night a further layer of snow was deposited. Wait, then, my British friend! When the day comes, and it is near at hand, when after noon the snow on yonder peak is melted by the sun, then the Grand Duke will once more advance and drive the Turks before him.

“Ah! That is you, Nicholas, my comrade! The man I have looked for these many weeks.”

A young officer of the Russian army had just emerged from a billet near to which Guy and the other had been chatting, and, seeing two officers in conversation—one of them senior to himself and the other British—he at once saluted. It happened that Guy was looking in the other direction, and, turning only in time to return the salute, had as yet not seen the face of this officer.

“Ha!” he heard the one he had been chatting with shout, as he stepped rapidly from his side and advanced towards the other; “Nicholas, my old friend, how glad I am to see you. Come this way, and let

me introduce you to a British sailor, one who helps to form the crew of the naval armoured-car detachment."

"Guy Grammond, my friend, permit me to present Lieutenant Nicholas Ivan Kanovitch."

"Kanovitch!" exclaimed Guy. "Kanovitch!" he almost shouted; "Kanovitch—Nicholas Kanovitch, of Moscow? Never!"

"Guy Grammond! Jupiter! What a discovery! You here—and in Russia!"

"Russia!" cried Guy jubilantly, stretching out a hand and gripping that of his old friend—that old friend whom he had left in Moscow under such different circumstances—one, indeed, who had striven so hard to keep our hero for the Russian army. "In Russia? But, my friend, this is Armenia. And who would have imagined that we should meet here—so far from Moscow?"

"Armenia, you say—no, Russia, my dear friend," came the instant answer. "For if Erzerum, the chief city of the Armenians, was Turkish ten weeks or more ago, it is now as solidly Russian as is Kiev, or any other Muscovite city. No, my friend, we meet in Russia, thanks to the gallant exploits of the Caucasian armies of the Grand Duke Nicholas. And you're here too, Guy. What luck! And, as our friend here tells me, you're attached to the British naval party. That sounds a very jolly branch of the service to be-

long to; and, yes, I remember now, you've already been engaged with Kurdish cavalry."

Seeing that the two young fellows were known to one another, though the fact caused him some surprise, the other officer, who had been chatting with Guy, apologized for withdrawing, saluted, and, turning on his heel, went away, leaving our two young friends to gossip. Nor was it till some hours later—till Guy had accompanied Nicholas back to his own quarters and had supped with him—that the two could separate, or had, indeed, nearly completed their exchange of news, or had more than half discussed the old interests which had bound them together in days gone by, and now still formed a bond of union between them.

"So you've been over to England, and have met a German submarine? That's an adventure," declared Nicholas as he puffed his cigarette after supper. "And I suppose anyone who escapes one of those craft has to be heartily congratulated. Mind you, the German submarine, used as it is, without care for the lives of enemies or neutrals, is, after all, not the only form of frightfulness indulged in by the Kaiser and his people. We who have been fighting in Russia have had Zeppelin bombs to contend with, have had spies to root out and deal with; and in Poland we saw some of our best friends treated as diabolically as were the unfortunate Belgians. And now, after all

the adventures you have had, you are here, no longer the penniless orphan I knew you, it seems, but quite set up in life—holding the rank of an officer with these British friends of ours; possessed of parents, or shall I say relatives, again; and—ahem!” he added, giving Guy a piercing glance and blowing a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling—“ahem, my dear boy, it seems—possessed also of a cousin.”

Nicholas grinned, and grinned the wider when he saw the blood surge to Guy’s cheeks.

“Sorry!” he ventured, giving vent to a gentle yet meaning cough, “if I—if—as it were—I trespassed on—er—shall we say—private grounds. I—well—er—of course—I apologize!” And then he burst into a shout of laughter. “Dear, dear!” he cried. “And to think that Guy Grammond has come to this! Guy—whom I knew as a silent, retiring, bashful beggar. But a truce to jokes. I know all about you now and your movements, and shall now gratify your curiosity as to my own. I’m one of the scouts of the Caucasus army, detailed specially for the coming advance.”

“Scouts! Mounted, then?” Guy asked him.

“Certainly. But not always on horseback. These are days of movement, my boy,” Nicholas responded. “Russia is going the pace, with a vengeance! Consider, now; we have captured the whole of Upper Armenia, and shall not be content till we have cleared

130 The Armoured-car Scouts

the Turks out of Asia and have joined hands with the British in Constantinople. That wants pace, my boy! Scouts mounted on horseback would take months to cover the ground, and so we have taken a leaf out of the British book, and are now using motor-bicycles."

"Motor-bicycles!" gasped Guy.

"Certainly! Why not?" came the answer.

"Every reason why you should; only, don't you see," said Guy, his eyes sparkling with delight, "I'm also acting as scout to our armoured-car detachment—as mounted scout—mounted on a bicycle."

Nicholas gave vent to a whistle, not a whistle of astonishment, for there was no reason on earth why Guy should not be performing the same duties as his friend, but a whistle of delight, a whistle denoting anticipation.

"Jupiter!" he cried; "but that should be splendid! Supposing, now, you and I were detached together for the very same duty!"

"Supposing!"

Even the most unlikely things happen, and happen frequently in warfare, so that there was nothing really very wonderful in the fact that, less than a week later, Guy and Nicholas found themselves setting out from Upper Armenia, from the city of Erzerum, mounted on their trusty motor-bicycles, with the garrulous Jo on another—a more powerful machine than theirs—to

which was attached a specially built side-car for the conveyance of provisions, ammunition, and other necessities for a detached expedition.

“Now, you’ll just see that you don’t run your heads into any foolish sort of business,” cautioned the Lieutenant, with whom he had so often to deal, a few minutes before the party set out, shaking a warning finger in Guy’s face, and casting a stern glance—that is, as stern as he could make it—at Jo, who returned his look with one specially prepared for the occasion, and as mild as milk-and-water. “Just listen to this,” continued the Lieutenant: “Cossacks have cleared the ground for some twenty miles to the west, while in the south we have pushed on even farther. Elsewhere the country swarms with Turks and Kurds, and information is required as to their points of concentration. It is not a job for armoured cars in any case, and more particularly where roads are hardly existent; it is a case for men mounted on motor-bicycles such as you have, and capable of making rapid progress. But—but—” he repeated, giving the incorrigible Jo another of his stern glances, “but it is not a case for madmen, but for fellows possessed of some caution, prepared to scout ahead with care and thoroughness, and to return if circumstances are against them. You hear that, then?”

Guy smiled, while Jo saluted.

“Certainly, sir! Of course, sir—be cautious, sir—

132 The Armoured-car Scouts

that's what we are noted for, so our comrades will tell you."

"Then off you go—and good luck with you!"

Many pairs of eyes—of envious eyes, we should add — watched the trio as they ran their machines slowly from the city and descended the winding roads which led from Upper Armenia to the plains below. The country which they were to traverse was perhaps a thousand feet or more lower than that where the city of Erzerum was erected, and, though it presented here and there wide plains, and indeed was far more level than was the country known as Upper Armenia, yet, for the most part, the terrain which the Grand Duke Nicholas and his troops must cross on their way westward through Turkey was composed of hill and dale, of valleys and ridges.

"And not always easy going either," Nicholas told his two companions that evening, as the trio pulled up just within the line of Russian outposts, and, having selected a convenient site, began to prepare their meal.

"I'm told by our intelligence folks who have crossed this part of the world that some of the ridges are almost unclimbable, and that in places it is necessary for vehicles to be halted at the foot of a ridge, and for the contents to be carried over by man-power—that is to say, the roads over the ridges here and there are impassable for wheeled traffic."

"Like the pass beneath which that small party of

ours had their first action with the enemy," Guy ventured, nodding in Jo's direction. "But a bicycle could pass. I went up to the top of the pass, and ought to know something about it."

"You did," Jo responded, with a grin. "Why, see here, Mr. Nicholas, I was watching this 'ere interpreter of ours up there at the top of the pass, and when he says the road was good enough for a motor-bicycle, why you can believe him, for with these two eyes of mine I see him turn tail and come swishin' down at a pace that would have overturned any other machine but the sort of thing we're riding. He just turned tail, Mr. Nicholas, and bolted."

Jo grinned, and looked appealingly at the Russian, as if asking him to take up the challenge which he had thrown down, and to assist him in twitting our hero. Let us explain, too, that Nicholas, thanks to his long companionship with Guy, could speak English almost as well as Guy could chatter in Russian, and, more than that, being the sharp young fellow that he was, could appreciate a joke with anyone.

"Bolted—eh? Oh!" he exclaimed, looking very serious. "He got up to the top of the pass and then turned tail; that is what you mean—eh, Jo? Bolted for his life—er—not—f—funked? Oh, dear, no!"

Guy turned scarlet; Jo grinned broadly at the Russian, and then all three burst into hearty laughter; for did not Jo very well know the reputation that our

134 The Armoured-car Scouts

hero had gained in that little action? And did not Nicholas long ago hear—not from our hero, be it noted, but from Jo, from the Lieutenant, and from many of his comrades—how gallantly his English friend had acted? Why, even the modest Guy could not be oblivious of the fact that whatever he had done met with the warm approval of his seniors.

“It was a plucky thing to do, to stand up to all those Kurds when right away from the support of our party,” the Lieutenant had told him—had told him, too, in the hearing of the handy-men who controlled the armoured cars. “It’s a very different thing for us to have remained down there in the hollow with that smooth space all round us, in just an ideal situation for an armoured-car action—that was a very different thing altogether—but up there you were alone, youngster, with just your one rifle, and those beggars meant to make mince-meat of you.”

Yes, Guy had won considerable praise and an enviable reputation for his action on that occasion, and could not fail to know it. Thus, when Jo—the incorrigible Jo—ventured to poke fun at him, though flushing readily, he realized his humour and enjoyed the joke against himself.

Seated about the fire which they had built, the three watched their kettle of water as it boiled above the hissing embers, while Jo—the garrulous Jo—a handy-man indeed—for he was capable of almost any-

thing, and was quite an experienced campaigner—fried some savoury morsels in a pan which he had produced from the side-car, and soon had Guy and Nicholas sniffing in anticipation of the meal for which they were waiting. And how they enjoyed that meal under the open skies, with the stars shining down upon them! And how the three of them slept that night to the leeward of some rocks, wrapped in their greatcoats and their blankets!

At sunrise on the following morning they were up, and, discovering a stream not far distant, enjoyed a bathe, and then returned to breakfast. It was just when the Russian outposts were being changed, and the sun had risen high enough to flood the landscape, that the three set out for that unknown land which they were to investigate for the Grand Duke Nicholas.

“Of course, our chief duty is to keep out of sight of the enemy as long as possible,” said Guy, who at the invitation of Nicholas had taken command of the little party. “It stands to reason that we shall not be able to go very far without being observed by someone, and then we must act as circumstances dictate. Perhaps we shall have to retire, though only for a time; and perhaps we shall find it more convenient to go forward. In any case, we must use our eyes to watch the surrounding country, so that, supposing we have to move back to our outposts, we shall be able to return during the hours of darkness.”

As a matter of fact, it so turned out that when the little party had proceeded some five miles, and had gained a gentle ridge, a column of smoke arising away on their right attracted their attention, and presently other columns were seen in the distance.

"Those are signals, without a doubt!" declared Nicholas. "And if you watch you will see that the smoke in every case rises from high ground. I vote we halt and see what happens."

Resting their machines in a sheltered spot, beside the track which they were following, the three lay down on the summit of the ridge, taking up positions which gave them a clear view of the country all round, but which prevented their figures showing against the sky-line. Yet, although they watched those columns of smoke through their glasses for half an hour, nothing else happened—not a figure was seen, no Turkish soldier, infantry or horseman, was seen in any direction.

"Perhaps we have alarmed ourselves unnecessarily," said Guy, becoming impatient. "Besides, those fires seem to have died down, which would make it appear that they are bivouacs, or something equally simple."

"Bivouacs!" exclaimed Nicholas. "Hardly likely, Guy. It would be strange indeed if the Turks occupying this part of the country were to select a dozen bivouacs, and light their fires directly after each other,

always on high ground, and at points far removed from one other. No, those columns of smoke were signals—of that I'm positive; and though I am as keen as you are to move on, I vote for caution."

"Hear, hear!" ejaculated Jo. "I'm with you, Mr. Nicholas. In these 'ere cases, when there's a doubt, it's a wise man that lies 'doggo'. Besides, signals you said, Mr. Nicholas—well now, what's that!"

The strange, stumpy finger of the sailor was pushed out before him, and held pointed towards a distant ridge, from the summit of which one of the smoke columns ascended.

"If that ain't a man—a Turk, or something like it—well, call me a Dutchman!"

All three pairs of glasses were instantly levelled at the point he indicated, and very soon Guy and his friends were sure that they were under observation. If they were impatient, no doubt, too, the Turks—having lost sight of the figures they had discerned advancing from the Russian outpost lines—had also become impatient, and, fearful that the men whom they had seen advancing into what they deemed to be a trap would escape, they came out into the open, and presently a party of horsemen galloped across from the point to which Jo had directed the attention of his comrades to one far nearer—in fact, that ridge from which the nearest column of smoke had ascended. Then other figures appeared, and presently men could

be seen stealing along the far side of the ridge towards the gap which the trio were occupying.

"I should say they were puzzled," Guy told his friends; "one of their outposts no doubt saw us leave the Russian lines and advance in this direction, and signalled at once to the Turks in rear. Perhaps he lost sight of us at a bend in the track, or more likely in the valley which we have just passed through, for it bends sharply at an angle. He'll know, of course, that we haven't gone back, but will not be certain where we are hiding. Keep an eye out in this direction while I creep down the hill a little and investigate our immediate surroundings."

A careful survey of the country close to the ridge showed Guy that the valley which he and his friends had followed, keeping to the track which ran along its centre close to a bubbling stream, divided into two close to the foot of the pass which they had ascended, where indeed was the sharp bend to which he had previously referred. At that bend the track too divided, one portion of it straggling up the side to the ridge, while the other followed the forked arm of the valley and disappeared behind a mass of trees. Bending low, and clambering a little higher amongst the boulders, he turned his glasses on that valley, and, following its line, felt sure that when it had run on perhaps a mile or more it turned to the right again very sharply and opened out into flat country.

“Our own outposts are undoubtedly commanding that valley,” he told himself, “and if Turks attempted to make their way along it they could fire down upon them. No doubt, too, they have their glasses on us at this moment, so that they will not make the mistake of firing on us if we turn and go in that direction. The move seems to me worth while; it means that we must return perhaps half a mile or less, strike to the south, and then due west, which is our proper direction.”

Returning to his friends, the three discussed the matter rapidly, all the while keeping their eyes on the enemy creeping along towards them.

“No one wants to go back,” said Nicholas, an opinion with which Jo agreed with an emphatic nod, “but everyone wants to go forward; only, don’t you know, ‘slow and sure’ isn’t a bad sort of motto even at the commencement of this business. It seems to me that the Russian outposts are sure to be faced by Turkish outposts, and if only we can get behind the latter we may very well find a deserted country. Of course, if it were possible to travel at night the thing would be far easier; but then, who wants to cross this sort of country in the hours of darkness?”

No one with any care for his own comfort or security. For, to tell the truth, this part of the world is cut up into a succession of narrow valleys, with steep ridges on either side, with water-courses — often shallow

enough, yet sometimes deep and swift—running along the valleys, with boulders strewn here and there, and with roads which are little better than cart tracks. So if it were more dangerous to attempt to break through the enemy's lines within the hours of daylight, it was hardly less dangerous than to make the same attempt in darkness. Therefore the three voted emphatically that that retirement from the ridge should be only a temporary one, and, regaining their machines, and taking care not to show up against the sky-line, ran down to the foot, and, gaining the point where the valley divided, turned into the track which Guy had selected. Pushing on through that for a matter of ten minutes, they presently gained the open, and, having halted once more to search the country to their front, and, seeing no sign of any Turk, or indeed of any individual, they got going again, and, opening their throttles, went on in single file at a pace which carried them across the long stretch of flat ground to a distant valley.

An hour later they were following a track which led slightly north of west, and by noon were some twenty miles beyond the Russian outposts. They had gained, in fact, the heart of the enemy country—unobserved, they thought and hoped—and it seemed that great opportunities for observation of the Turks lay before them.

CHAPTER VIII

The Barbarous Turk

“MY boys, just in the very heart of things!” exclaimed Nicholas that evening as the three of them, having found a broken-down shanty in what had been a tiny hamlet, but was now a mass of ruins, took up their quarters in a sheltered spot—that is to say, in this one-roomed shanty. The walls and the roof also were fairly sound, and with the help of boards which they found near by they repaired the rents, to keep out the weather—should it rain—and, more than all, to shut in the light of the fire which they had kindled.

There was not the least ceremony between the members of this dashing little party, and just as on the Western front, when officers and men are detached on some reconnoitring work together, differences of rank are more or less dropped, and men and officers become wonderfully chummy, so here, to look at the three, to hear their conversation, one would never have guessed that there was the smallest difference between the rank of the garrulous, smiling, and jovial Jo—the man above all others to keep up the spirits of this

little company — and Guy — the modest Guy — interpreter to the naval armoured-car detachment, holding a commission in the British navy, and Nicholas, his Russian chum—quite a swell when with Muscovite troops fighting against the German enemy.

“Believe me, things look as rosy as they possibly can,” repeated Nicholas, rubbing his hands together and spreading out his palms so as to catch some of the warmth from the flames which swept upwards from the pile of broken timber with which the fire was built, “if, as I believe, we have got through here without being noticed——”

“Ah!” came from Jo, and he smiled serenely at the Russian; “that ’ud be splendid. Now, sir, wouldn’t it? But—well now——”

“But what?” asked Guy severely. “You don’t mean to say that you think that we were seen?”

Jo rolled his eyes and smiled, this time at the interpreter.

“Now, look you here, sir, and you too, Mr. Nicholas, let’s have a plain talk on the matter. Supposing we was to change things over a bit, swop horses a bit, as you might say; supposin’, now, we was Turks, and the Turks hereabouts was this little party. They are tryin’, can’t you see, to sneak into our lines, past our outposts, and they are crazy enough to make the attempt in daylight. What’s more, they don’t come on their feet, nor on horseback, which would allow them,

in the first place, to walk along, keeping to the hills, and, in the second, to cover the ground quickly and in silence; but they come puffin' and blowin' along, and rattlin' away on motor-bicycles. What then?"

"What then?" demanded Nicholas, helping himself to a cigarette and picking a flaming stick from the fire with which to light it. "Well, what then?" he asked a little curtly; for to tell the truth the young Russian was a little disconcerted, a little vexed with the jovial mariner for having upset his dream as it were, for having dared, in fact, to suggest that the party had not been quite so successful as he imagined.

But if he thought to put out the incorrigible Jo, to alarm him, to cause him even the smallest amount of regret, he was very much mistaken.

"It's just like this 'ere, sir," the sailor said, pulling that short clay of his from his pocket and stuffing the bowl, while with the toe of one boot he touched the handle of that frying-pan with which he was such an adept, and in the centre of which there lay at that moment a frizzling steak—their supper for the evening; "it's like this 'ere, Mr. Nicholas, and you too, young shaver—beg parding, don't you know, Mr. Guy, but you're 'young shaver' to me always, ain't you?"

"And quite right, too," laughed Guy; "no ceremony, Jo, none of that sort of nonsense. You and I made acquaintance under queer conditions—eh?"

"You may say so. 'Queer conditions'—eh? what?" chuckled Jo, treating Nicholas to a broad wink. "He says 'queer conditions', Mr. Nicholas, and no doubt he's told you something about 'em. Now, I ask you, when a young feller's found supportin' of a pretty gal, what's laid 'er 'ead on his shoulder, and them two is all alone a-floatin' in the ocean, is that what you'd call 'queer conditions'? Lummy! 'Queer conditions!' My word! But you was a-talkin', young shaver!"

"No, I wasn't," answered Guy a little shortly. It really annoyed him to have that subject brought up so frequently; and, struggle as he might, whenever the question of his rescue of his fair cousin was mentioned, it always made him feel as if he were guilty of some species of crime; it always sent the blood rushing to his cheeks, and just as naturally brought shouts of laughter from his companions. It was sure bait for our hero—a bait he rose to as easily as a trout might do to a favourite fly—and though he had had now many a warning of the results of snatching at that fly, he yet took the bait on every occasion, swallowed it at a gulp, and then flared at the consequences. But a moment afterwards, in every case, he joined in the laughter at his own expense.

"Oh, go on!" he grumbled; "we've heard all this before. Get on, Jo."

"Well, I will when I'm allowed, sir," the latter

responded respectfully enough now, quite serious, indeed, for the moment; "and I'd like to remind you, young shaver, that it wasn't me that raised the question; it was you what talked about the circumstances under which we got introduced to one another. Well, now, where were we?"

"Talking of our coming here. I must say I thought we'd slipped through without being observed," broke in Nicholas, blowing a pensive blast of smoke towards the rafters of the shanty.

"In course you did; and there's no one hopes it more than I do, in a way," added Jo, "in a kind o' way, don't you know, Mr. Nicholas. I'll explain," as the two looked at him a little puzzled: "supposin', now, we did slip through with those exhausts of ours a-rattlin', and supposin' we outwitted the Turkish outposts altogether; well, then, we've a time before us! But it would be more lively, now, wouldn't it, if they'd spotted our coming and were after us at this moment?"

It was just the sort of thing one might have expected of Jo—this incorrigible, irrepressible individual, who, like the gallant Lieutenant who had led that detachment of armoured cars, hungered for more enemies and more dangers. Nor would the additional difficulties which discovery would certainly bring about frighten Guy or Nicholas; only, seeing that they were the responsible members of this little party, dis-

covery would lead to an active search for them, and while it would increase their difficulties, as we have mentioned, it would at the same time limit their opportunities.

“I’ll grant you that it’s more than likely that the enemy knows that we have slipped through their outposts,” said Guy after a while, when he had taken a lusty bite out of his portion of steak, which Jo had now removed from the pan and had cut into three pieces, each piece being placed upon an enamelled plate, which, like the frying-pan, had been extracted from the side-car accompanying the expedition. “They’d be fools if they hadn’t seen us or heard our engines; but—and this is a point which I think we have a right to take for granted—thanks to our speed we’ve slipped away from any outposts who may have seen us. Of course, they’ll send reports to head-quarters, and search-parties will be sent after us; but don’t forget that we struck almost due south after we were first observed, then west, and for twenty miles now we have been travelling north of west, and for the last mile almost due north. Another twenty or thirty miles will take us right up behind the centre of their outposts, and, as there are no telephones and telegraphs—for the Turkish army, though well equipped, is said not to be possessed of much equipment for field-telegraphy—it seems to me that those search-parties may be hunting the air south of us, while

others farther north are ignorant of our presence. How's that?"

"Spoken like a law'er, Mr. Guy," Jo grinned, "like a law'er, and I'll make bold to say that you've put the case in a nutshell. It stands to reason, don't it, Mr. Nicholas, that our rush from the outpost line of our own people was noticed?"

"Granted that we know that they saw us, what then?"

"Then it stands to reason also that some other fellow spotted us when we dashed south out of that valley; but, likely as not, as Mr. Guy 'ere says, we are lost now, and that's just what we wanted. Hi, ho! A fellow feels sleepy after a day like this in the open. What about turning in and preparing for a long run to-morrow?"

Having smoked their pipes and chatted for a time, while the embers of the fire died down and they digested their suppers, the three made preparations to pass the night, it being arranged that one should remain on watch for three hours while his comrades slept. It was dark by now, densely dark outside, though the sky was studded with a million stars, which out there in the East shone with peculiar brilliancy. In the shanty, too, it was densely dark, though now and again the tiny embers of the fire flickered and flamed up and cast their rays on two figures, wrapped in blankets, asleep in a corner; the

third, a solitary individual—Guy Grammond to wit—wrapped in his thick naval coat and armed with a revolver, paced the rough track which ran through the village, marching this way and that, halting now and again to listen for sounds of approaching enemies, stamping his feet—for at night it was cold yet in Lower Armenia—and then trudging on again, humming some favourite air, and later halting once more to look about him. So the three hours passed, and, looking at the illuminated dial of his watch, he knew that his vigil was ended.

It was Jo then who took his place and swaggered up and down the track with that nautical lurch of his which would have told even a Turk that here was no soldier; and, finally, as the sky began to lighten a trifle, Nicholas went on guard till the morning dawned and another day of adventure lay before them.

Kicking the almost dead embers of the fire into life again, and supplying it with added bits of timber, Jo soon had a merry blaze rising towards the rafters of the shanty, and also a kettle of water boiling over with the heat, and slices of tinned bully beef sizzling in that pan of his. Then came the inevitable smoke while they inspected their machines just within the door of the shanty. Perhaps half an hour later they were out on the track again, and, having first of all taken the precaution to clamber to a neighbouring height and search

the country all round with their glasses, the trio set their engines going, mounted their machines, and once more shot off on their journey. Halting now and again as they gained higher ground, and always inspecting every inch of valley and hill which lay before them, they had covered quite forty miles by midday, and but for a single party of Kurdish horsemen they saw in a distant valley, and watched till they rode out of sight towards the east, they had seen not a single enemy and not a single inhabitant.

“Queer,” said Guy, his brow puckered and his thoughts busy. “Here have we covered, I should say, quite forty miles, and haven’t seen even so much as a peasant. What’s it mean?”

Nicholas shook his head, for he too was puzzled.

“What’s it mean?” he repeated. “Can’t say. Curious part of the thing is that we’ve passed farms and small hamlets, but the majority were knocked to pieces, some burnt to the ground, and all more or less ruined.”

“Ruined within recent times—within a month or so,” added Jo reflectively. “Now, if you was to ask me what it meant, I should say that these ’ere Turks had driven the people on before them, had forced them to leave the open country, and had concentrated them somewhere or other. One moment. What’s that out there in front—a village?”

The little party pulled their machines up, and, as they

always did on such occasions, ran them into shelter behind a mass of bushes, then, wriggling their way to the top of the rise which they had been ascending, and which was only a few feet above them, they peered out into the country beyond—a cleft in the side of the hill they had been ascending had given Jo just a glimpse of the ground in front. And there, as they looked down, they discovered a village just as he had said—a village to all appearances undisturbed, not ruined like those hamlets and farms they had passed, not even fired yet, and, though they watched it through their glasses for some five minutes or more, apparently deserted and uninhabited. Guy whistled his astonishment, while Jo showed the whites of his eyes by way of demonstrating his amazement, and Nicholas puffed out his cheeks—a habit he had on such occasions.

“Now if that don’t beat me hollow!” Jo exclaimed. “What’s it mean? Where are all the people? Gone to ground, like our folks out in France—eh?”

“But there are no cattle either, nor any horses in the fields, no hens round the cottages, or huts, or whatever you like to call them,” observed Guy. “The place seems to be utterly deserted. Let’s push on and see what we can make of the mystery.”

Convinced that there was no fear of falling into an ambush, for from the point they occupied they were able to look down and peer into every crevice in the

ground below, the three ran their machines down the rough track, still in Indian file, and slowly motored into the village.

"Quite clear that it has only recently been deserted," said Guy. "You can see for yourself that the track is well beaten and trodden, and is clear of grass and weeds, which in this spring weather, with the rains we have been having at night and the warm sunshine during the day, would soon cover the place. Look here!" he cried, a moment later, entering the open door of one of the huts of the village; "the embers of this fire are warm, the sides of the chimney are warm, and—what's that?"

He started back, and Nicholas and Jo, following him into the place, and staring into the far corner, started back with him, giving vent to exclamations of horror. For on a rough native bed in the far corner lay a corpse—the corpse of a woman who had been murdered. In the yard outside lay the body of a child, strangled to death by some miscreant, while from the higher eaves of the adjoining house hung the dangling figure of an unfortunate peasant—probably the father of this family. There were other bodies elsewhere; the place, indeed, was a horrible charnel-house. There were signs in all directions that a massacre had taken place, and that but a few hours earlier.

No wonder, then, that Guy staggered into the open, pale, his forehead moist, his palms dripping, his

breath coming fast, and his teeth set at the sight of all this horror. No wonder, also, that Jo—that genial, gentle mariner, with a heart of gold and a spirit capable of carrying him through any amount of hardship and danger—no wonder that he too lurched from the hut, his face a ghastly colour, his lips muttering, and those genial and usually merry eyes of his not twinkling now, but positively blazing.

“Some brutes have been at work here,” he gasped.

“Some devils; some Germans—eh?”

“No,” interrupted Nicholas; “no—Turks, not Germans, though it is said they have instigated some of these massacres. I am unable to state positively, though I have heard it said, that if the Kaiser and his war lords did not instigate and approve of the wholesale massacre of these unfortunate Armenian people, they, in any case, have not lifted so much as a finger to protect them.”

“Armenian people! Massacres!” exclaimed Jo.

“Yes,” repeated Nicholas. “Surely you know? Surely you have heard the whole horrible tale? No. Then I’ll tell you. Listen to this. The Armenian people are, for the most part, Christian, and for that reason alone are hated and despised by their Turkish masters; but, in addition, they are often enough a thriving, prosperous people because of their industry. In any case, they are detested by their Turkish masters, and for long have suffered odious persecution,

which at times has blazed up to such an extent as to result in local massacres. But since this World War started, since the Turks threw in their lot with the Germans, a dead and bitter set has been made against the Armenians, and literally thousands on thousands have been murdered. Here and there just a sprinkling of them, just a few unfortunate people, are cut down; some villages have been wiped out without leaving a single survivor; while in other parts I gather that whole tracts of country have been swept by these fiendish Turks, every living Armenian being driven to some collecting centre, and then the crowd forced to take the road and march out into open spaces. There the women have been sold off or killed, and the men and boys horribly and cruelly murdered."

Nicholas did not overrate the matter nor overpaint his picture; for though, since the war commenced, Turkey has been more or less a closed country, yet neutrals have brought to the outside world terrible tales of Armenian massacres. Nor did the gallant Russian officer who accompanied Guy and Jo blame the Kaiser and his war lords without reason; for who can imagine for a single moment that Germany, that country which had prepared so carefully and so long for war, and which was so well served by its intelligence branch, could fail to be cognizant of the doings in Asia, the acts of her Turkish ally? There can be

little doubt, indeed, but that there was some horrible bargain between the Turks and their German masters. Perhaps it was that Germany would hold her hand and still her voice, shutting her eyes to what was happening to the Armenians, and receiving from the Turks in exchange, as a reward we will say, some other consideration. In any case massacres did take place, and possibly are taking place as we write, in Lower Armenia. For Upper Armenia has been rescued by the gallant Russians. Nor can there be any doubt that literally thousands upon thousands of helpless, harmless, industrious people have been wantonly murdered. And here, under the very eyes of Guy and his friends, was an exhibition of Turkish cruelty. This village, a pleasant enough and peaceful spot only some few hours before, was now a horrible, hideous shambles, where men and women and children lay as their murderers had left them, where the guilt of the Young Turk Party was written large in letters of blood for all to see who happened to be in that neighbourhood.

It was with wide-open eyes and clenched teeth and fists that Jo and Guy listened to the tale.

“Of all the black-hearted, murdering brutes!” gasped the former at length. “What? Mr. Nicholas, you mean to tell me that there are men alive—men who could murder women and little children such as we have seen? Murder them in the worst possible

manner? What? No, no! Not men—brutes! Beasts! Hyenas!”

“I have heard of these massacres,” Guy ventured after a while, his face stern and set. “Let’s go on, for we can’t do anything further here, Nicholas, and the place is too horrible to remain in. It will haunt me for days and days—all my life I believe. To think that men could be capable of such atrocities!”

Once more they took the road and soon had the air singing past their ears, for unconsciously each one pressed his accelerator pedal a little harder than was his wont, while Guy, leading the party, bent low over his handles, his eyes staring and fixed ahead, his lips firmly pressed together, an air of stern resolution and determination about him. And so they sped on—in silence now—not as they had been accustomed to in the earlier hours, when perhaps Nicholas would forge up beside his British chum and would shout questions and remarks at him; or possibly Jo, opening his throttle, would press his way to the front and ride along where the track was broader, with Guy and Nicholas on either side of him. Then, as one may well imagine, jokes were flung from one to the other, for where Jo was there was always an atmosphere of fun. But now, as Guy cast his eye over his shoulder, he discovered Nicholas following, bent as he had been, over his handle-bars—moody, silent, looking very dogged, a deep furrow across his brows, an

intent look in his eyes which boded ill for the Turks if he should come upon them. As for Jo—that gallant, jovial Jo, the light and laughter of the party, the irrepressible, unsubduable little man who was such an excellent companion—he was transformed by that scene through which they had passed, and his face was now not the face of the sailor whom Guy had met under such curious and exciting conditions, but the face of a man who was distressed, was furious, and who had taken some deep resolution. If the little man did not speak, yet he could express his feelings, not only by his face, but by his actions; for, as if driven to red-hot exertion by his feelings, he now and then sent his machine surging ahead, and almost scooped Nicholas up on his side-car. Then of a sudden the party slowed down and came abruptly to a halt.

“Another village,” said Guy.

“Suppose it’s the same as the last?” asked Jo.

“Wait!” Nicholas tossed his glasses to his eyes and peered at the distant mass of roofs and houses. “A hamlet of fairly large proportions,” he said, “stands well in the open, and seems to be attached to a species of fort. For all one knows, perhaps some chieftain lived in that fort, and perhaps does so now, and the people in the hamlet are his serfs who till his fields and look to his cattle. Yes, there are people about, and no fear of our witnessing scenes such as we have just passed through.”

It was therefore with a feeling of relief that the party sped on to the hamlet, and presently, having halted again to inspect every corner through their glasses, they boldly ventured into the heart of the place, for they had failed to detect any other but peaceful peasants. Yet their coming caused considerable commotion, and indeed they found the main street thronged with excited people, while women rushed to and fro and children clamoured. Almost in the centre of the hamlet a number of aged peasants were gathered together, and amongst them a sprinkling of youths.

"What's amiss?" Guy asked them, for his long residence in Russia and the journeys he had made to the Caucasus had enabled him to pick up more than a smattering of Turkish *patois*. "There's something strange going on," he called to his companions as he dismounted from his bicycle. "All this excitement isn't due to our coming, and indeed it seems to me that all these people are so perturbed by something that they have taken practically no notice of us; whereas, at any other time, the fact that we are dressed in foreign uniforms would have caused no end of a ruction. What has happened?" he asked an aged man with a long white beard, who seemed to be the leader of the group collected in the main street.

"Happened, friend?—yes, friend; for I see that you are Russian," the man answered quietly and in

the most dignified manner. "Then listen for a while, friend, and you shall hear why these people are so upset—why women cry and wail, and children scream and clamour, and why we men, for the most part aged or merely youths—for all the men of promise have been swept away from our midst—why all we who are too aged to fight with the Germans and too old to protect our women stand here talking gravely, our peace of mind disturbed, our thoughts fixed on the death that is coming."

"The death that is coming," repeated Guy. "Why, you don't mean to tell me that— Wait!" he said, almost shouted. "We passed through a horrible village back there; you can't be waiting for that surely?"

"For death," the old man answered quietly, sternly, and yet without a tremor. "Tell me, my Russian friend, who speak our language so clearly, "you saw death in that village?"

"Death!" answered Guy, with a shiver; "we saw signs of a horrible massacre!"

"So," answered the old man; "that is what we wait for."

"But," shouted Guy, his indignation rising, stirred in fact by the very calmness of this aged man, "but you will not wait here and make no effort to save these women and children? Even if you have no fear for yourselves, if life has no value for you, still you have those about you who must be protected and

saved! Surely you will not sit here and talk, and chatter, and do nothing? Where are your arms? Where is your courage? Of what use to sit still and mutter?"

The old man with the long white beard held his hands up, palms forward, and silently expostulated.

"My friend," he said, speaking in the same calm tones, while he returned Guy's somewhat indignant gaze with one which was mild without being weak, firm without being resolute, "my friend," he said, "it is natural, perhaps, that you who are young and active, and may be well armed too, should speak of action to be taken, methods to be adopted, to protect these women and children; but then you do not know the local conditions. Hark! Were you to stand on that ridge yonder you would perhaps hear the shrieks of poor wretches being slaughtered in a village beyond, and could see the ruffians who carry out the will of the Sultan. Perhaps there are a hundred of them—perhaps even more—all well armed and equipped, all well mounted, every man of them young and fierce and active; and we—look at us! Old men and mere youths, with perhaps twenty old muskets amongst us, and perhaps also as many rifles hidden in the rafters of our houses."

"And that over there, that fort?" asked Guy, casting a quick glance at the square-shaped mass of masonry which seemed to overhang the village.

"Once it was the house of a wealthy nobleman of these parts, then it became a storehouse for our grain, and since this war broke out it has been a barracks occupied by Turkish troops; now, my friend, it is but an empty cellar, for the Turks have eaten our stores and gone without payment. But that matters little, seeing that they will return within a short space of time to murder those who provided them with victuals."

The position was so utterly strange, so seemingly impossible, so unprecedented, that it was no wonder that Guy stood agape, staring at the old man for some few moments; while later, when he had given the news to Jo and Nicholas, they too stared back at him, unable to venture a suggestion, beaten by the curious position in which they found themselves.

"It's hard to understand it all," said Guy at last; "but, if you put yourself in the position of the unfortunate and unhappy people, I think you can realize how they feel. Having been subdued by years of servitude and oppression, they know well that their lives are nothing to their Turkish masters, and already they must have heard numerous and dreadful tales of the massacres of their brethren; and now after the younger men have been driven off, perhaps to be slain elsewhere, or perhaps to be forced into the ranks of some Turkish regiment, those who remain—the weak old men and mere youths, and women and children—

hear that neighbouring villages are being ransacked by a set of ruffians, and that every soul is being killed at the nominal bidding of the Sultan; can you wonder, then, that they stand here and shiver, and mumble, and do nothing?"

"But—but——" exploded Jo. "The murdering devils! And you say—or rather this old boy tells us—that they are only over the ridge yonder, and are expected at any moment? But you don't expect me to stand here in the middle of this street and look on whilst women and children are being slaughtered? It ain't in human nature, sir. I'll go off to the ridge and see what I can do with 'em."

And go the sailor would have done in a moment, in his impetuous, irrepressible manner, thoughtless of the risks he ran, and of what would happen to his comrades; but Guy gripped him by the sleeve as he mounted his bicycle, while Nicholas stood in front of the machine and gesticulated violently.

Guy cast his eye round the village, and then again at the fort, and gave vent to a whistle.

"Jo isn't the one to stand here and see women murdered; he's taken the trouble to tell us that," he said, a little curtly. "Well, he's not the only one to feel in that sort of way. I, for instance—you too, Nicholas, no doubt—have no intention of sitting down and doing nothing. I've a sort of a plan running through my head. I suggest that we march

every man, woman, and child within the village to that old fort, block up the doors, stack the place with food and water if we can, and put up a fight with the rascals who are expected to return and wipe out all these people."

Jo, half-astride the saddle of his machine, leapt clear of it, and, rushing forward, gripped Guy's hand, while Nicholas brought one of his rather delicate paws down with a bang on our hero's shoulder.

"Done!" shouted the sailor; "with you!"

"With you!" cried Nicholas.

"Then let's get moving," said Guy. "Let me talk the matter over with this old fellow, and place my plans before him."

CHAPTER IX

Aiding the Defenceless

THE eyes of that old man, whom Guy and his friends had come upon in the midst of that Armenian village, brightened as our hero unfolded his plans, and even twinkled as he heard how this young fellow who had come so strangely from the Russian lines proposed to protect the humble inhabitants of the village. Ten minutes before, this aged man had been prepared to die without a struggle; for, indeed, he was too old to care much what happened to himself, though for the women and children and youths he had much pity. Yet years of persecution and of servitude had robbed him of all energy, and he was so subdued that he could feel not even so much as bitter hatred for the Turks who had for so long hounded down his own people. But Guy's energy and enthusiasm, the determination and the obvious spirit and courage of these three strangers, were so infectious, gave the old man such confidence, that he was transformed of a sudden, and, holding his hands aloft, called loudly to the people.

“Come here, all of you—all but the children. Now

164 The Armoured-car Scouts

listen! Stop that wailing, woman," he cried, turning fiercely upon one of the poor creatures. "Listen now, and do not disturb me. These friends of ours—these men who have come so strangely from the Russian lines to find us waiting death at the hands of these miscreants—advise that we protect ourselves, and offer to lead us. Listen again! and let no one disturb me. There are stores of food in many of our houses—stores that the Turks did not know about. Let every woman return to her house at once with all her children, load them with food, and send them without delay to the fort yonder. Let every woman, too, who knows of a weapon hidden within her house, take one of these youths and hand it to him, with every cartridge or scrap of ammunition that's buried. Hasten, ye people! Let not sloth delay our work, so that those murderers return and find our preparations but half completed."

It was wonderful what a scene of bustle arose in that tiny hamlet, and how, from being utterly despondent and terrified—as well they might be by the thought of what was about to befall them—old men and women and children and youths brightened up, rushed to their houses, and from their dwellings to the fort which frowned down upon the hamlet.

"Better for the three of us to break up for a time and superintend matters," said Guy, taking upon himself the command of the situation. "I'll go to the

fort—in fact, we'd all better go there with our machines, and put them in a safe corner. Then Nicholas will return to the village, while Jo—Jo—yes, on second thoughts, Jo will take my machine and run off towards the ridge in the direction from which our enemies are expected.”

Five minutes later Guy was standing on the wall which surrounded the fort, for indeed this fort was really but a walled compound with only a small portion of the interior roofed and providing shelter. The walls themselves were perhaps twenty feet in height, very thick, and provided near their base with a series of deep chambers, which the old man informed him had been used as storehouses, while the entrance—there being only one—was a narrow postern, to which the door still hung, though it was rotten and falling to pieces. Striding along the top of the wall Guy surveyed his surroundings critically, and cast now a glance at the hamlet and at the people there busying themselves and running with supplies towards the fort, and then an anxious glance over his shoulder towards the ridge over which the enemy would shortly appear. Yet minutes went on as people bustled to and fro, as children came with laden baskets, staggering under weights which threatened to crush them, while youths raced from the houses on to the top of the wall bearing weapons of every sort and shape, and some of great antiquity. Barely half an hour had elapsed

since the arrival of Guy and his friends in the hamlet before the place wore a decidedly different aspect, for whereas, before they put in an appearance, the streets had shown much activity; and with that group of old men and of youths discussing matters in its centre, and women wailing and running hither and thither, there was quite a large amount of movement; now all that could be seen was the tail-end of a procession of old men, youths, women, and children, staggering out of the hamlet with their last loads of provisions and ammunition, and casting many an anxious glance over their shoulders, lest at the last moment, even though these strangers had come and put fresh life and hope into them, those cruel Turks should swoop down on them and slay them where they stood.

“A jolly anxious time, believe me,” Nicholas shouted, seeing Guy on the wall above, perhaps fifty yards from him, overlooking the arrangements for defence. “You see no sign of them yet—eh? And what about Jo?”

“He’s coming back as fast as he can; I can hear his engine,” came the answer, “though I can’t see him myself, for he’s following some sunken road. Take your time, Nicholas; the fastest horseman, galloping from yonder ridge, could never get here before these people.”

Yet it was only natural that those unhappy folk should bustle and crowd as they got nearer the fort

and slowly passed beneath its entrance; then, carrying their burdens to those hollows at the foot of the walls, sat down and gasped after their exertions.

Nicholas meanwhile, at a word from Guy, superintended the efforts of a number of youths and some of the stronger of the women, who came staggering towards the doorway of the fort bearing boulders on their shoulders.

“Build the place up, leaving just enough room for Jo and his machine,” shouted Guy. “Collect your boulders close at hand so that you can throw them into the gap immediately he has passed in. Now, Nicholas, I’m going to divide these people up into parties, for there are a number of jobs to carry out, four walls to protect, and at present no knowing who has ever fired a rifle or who has any knowledge of fighting. Let the people fall in in two lines down the centre of the fort,” he called to the old man with the flowing beard—the head-man, no doubt, of the hamlet; “tell them to hasten, and then I’ll select some for one purpose and others for another. Hurry! Hurry! you people,” he shouted, and shouted it louder when, casting his eye yonder to the ridge, he saw mounted figures coming up over the sky-line, and, watching for a moment, saw how their numbers were added to. “Turks without a doubt,” he told himself, as he swung his glasses on the distant horsemen. “Turks or Kurds, I should say; and in no great hurry. That

looks well enough, and will give us extra time. No doubt they've no inkling of what's happening here, and no suspicion of the opposition preparing for them."

It happened, however, that, perhaps two minutes later, as he was hastening along the wall to the spot where steps ran up from the inside, he heard a distant shout, listened again, and caught the rattle of Jo's engine, now very much nearer, and, looking yonder again, saw those horsemen start forward at a gallop, the leader waving those in rear to come forward.

"Spotted Jo—that's what it must be! Well, no matter," thought Guy, "for these ruffians are bound to find us before long. I'll put a man up here to watch, and then break the garrison up into parties."

Calling one of the younger women up the stairs—a young woman whom he had noticed because of her silence and her coolness—he bade her see that she kept her head well below the top of the wall, so as to escape observation, and to warn him when the enemy drew near. Then he ran down the steps, and arrived in the courtyard just as the rattle of the engine driving Jo's machine stopped suddenly, and the mariner came swirling in through the doorway.

"There's a good cool hundred of 'em—a good cool hundred of those devils—comin' this way, Mr. Guy," he reported, his face set and grim. "Devils did I call 'em? S'welp me! If you'd been up there and looked over the top o' that ridge with your glasses, as

I did, and had peeped down into the village beyond—not three hundred yards beyond—you'd 'ave ground yer teeth; most likely you'd have gone rushin' down into the centre of the place just to let off yer revolver and kill some of those devils. And the shouts, and the cries, and the screams!"

Jo raised his hands and clapped them to his ears, as if he wished now to keep out those shrieks of terror which still resounded, still drummed at his ears.

"Horrible! Horrible!" he groaned brokenly. "Horrible! Brutal! Ghastly! It was bad enough back there, Mr. Guy, in that village; it put me all of a tremble when I saw those women and children—that child hanging from a beam, those other poor wretches; but to watch it going on! To watch them devils! It makes a man's blood boil! I'd—I'll—oh! Gi' me a gun! If I'd a machine-gun I'd wipe out every mother's son of 'em with pleasure."

"Sit down!" Guy ordered him, and Jo sat on the boulder promptly, his mouth agape, his eyes fixed on the young fellow who had addressed him.

For here of a sudden was a different Guy, a different individual from the modest, mild young interpreter whom he had known before. Yes, if Jo was grim and filled with deadly hatred of the Turk, Guy was as grim, as determined, as he was. But more than that, he was strangely alert, strangely abrupt, curiously commanding in his attitude.

170 The Armoured-car Scouts

"Now get your breath," he ordered Jo; "I shall want you in a moment."

"Yessir," the sailor answered unconsciously. "Certainly, sir; I'm ready."

"You're not," he was told abruptly. "Shut your mouth and keep quiet till I want you."

Rapidly walking along the straggling line of men and youths, Guy picked out those who looked the most resolute, and, with the help of the old man, quickly interrogated them.

"You can use a rifle—eh? Yes? Then pick one out—one of the modern ones. You've been accustomed to an old musket, and believe yours is amongst that pile? Go and get it, and fill your pockets with ammunition. Ah! You know how to use a sling? Got one on you? You always carry one, do you? Could you hit a man at forty yards and hurt him? That's good! And I see you've got a knife in your belt; but you'd be frightened to attack one of these Turkish beggars!"

"Frightened!" exclaimed the youth—a mere boy of fifteen and a half perhaps—a thin, sickly looking boy, yet one with spirit for all that, for his eyes flashed as he looked up at Guy. "No, sir! For now that you have come I am no longer frightened. Like you, I will fight and die—if need be—for my kinsmen."

It took some minutes to sort the people out, but presently they were divided into five groups: so

many oldish men and youths together manning each wall; so many women with the stronger of the girls behind them, some with boulders ready to toss down upon any who might approach, and others with stores of ammunition, which was perilously short, to replace that used by the combatants. And in the centre stood a group of active youths, with Jo in command, armed for the most part with piles of stones collected into baskets and boxes.

“Keep your eye open, Jo!” sang out Guy gaily enough as he went towards the steps. “You’re our reserve, don’t forget that; and if one of the walls is more fiercely attacked than another, and it looks as though the enemy are going to break through, it’ll be your job to rush up and succour the defenders. But wait! You’ll be wasted down here with that rifle of yours idle in the courtyard. No, no; I must make a change in our plans. Nicholas commands the wall over the gateway; you’ll be in command of the party here on the right, while the old man and another—who seems a capable, resolute fellow—are in charge of the other walls. I’ll pick another likely individual for this fifth party.”

“And you?” called out Nicholas from the wall over the gateway.

“I shall be here, there, and everywhere, I expect; that is, of course, if you still wish me to be in command of this action.”

172 The Armoured-car Scouts

Jo saluted and grinned; Nicholas waved gaily to his comrade.

“Of course,” he shouted; “we’d court martial you if you refused. You’ll go on commanding until the Turks are beaten.”

Now that all was prepared, Guy made a circuit of the defenders, saw that those who were to hold the walls lay flat and out of sight of the enemy, and that each one built a little pyramid of stones and boulders—of which there were thousands down in the courtyard—in front of his head, so as to give him protection. Indeed, all the time as he selected those parties, and as the men took up their positions, women and children were toiling up and down with baskets of boulders, for they had long seen the intention of this youth who had come to assist them.

As for the enemy, they had certainly galloped from the top of the ridge, having caught sight of that strange figure on a strange vehicle running down before them. But, losing sight of Jo as he sped on towards the hamlet, they pulled in their horses, and now came on at a walking pace towards the houses. Lying flat with the defenders, Guy clapped his glasses on them, and watched as the leaders entered the hamlet and pulled up in its centre. He saw the men dismount at a signal from one of the Turks, and heard them thump on the doors of the huts with their rifles; then he listened to the astonished shouts of the horsemen.

“Empty! Not one of them here! Surely there is some mistake?” the leader cried, and then laughed. “But—but,” he called to his men, “this is no welcome to offer the faithful troops of the Sultan, friends who come on a visit. Think ye that they are frightened of us?”

Sinister grins answered this exclamation, men muttered and giggled, and then, at a sign from their leader, slid from their horses and assisted those who were already searching the houses. It was perhaps five minutes later that the truth dawned upon the enemy that the hamlet was indeed empty, and that the inhabitants, whom they had come to slay, had disappeared and had escaped their vengeance.

“See here, and here!” shouted one of the men, running along the track which had been followed by the women and the other inhabitants as they streamed towards the fort. “A morsel of food here, a bag of dates beside the path, a woman’s trinket, and here the shoe of some old rascal hurrying away from us.”

The leader of this band of ruffians cast his eye towards the fort, and took in the situation in a moment; then, hearing the words of his followers, he chuckled and smiled—a cruel smile—and pulled his beard reflectively.

“Why, indeed?” he asked, glancing sideways at his men; “why indeed? Why hurry away from us, who are friends of the peasants? For see, we come

to bring them release from life and all its worries and vexations. So they think to escape us, and to take shelter in the fort yonder! Then we will follow them there, and it shall be in the fort, instead of in their own hamlet, that their fate shall overtake them."

He led the way, mounted on his horse—as fine a figure as any of those Kurds whom Guy and his friends had been matched against so soon after their entrance into Turkey—and as they came our hero, with Nicholas and Jo now stretched beside him, peered over the top of the little parapet of stones built on the edge of the wall and counted these new enemies, reckoned up their strength, wondered what would follow, for indeed fate had cast them into a position far more dangerous than had been that in which Guy and Jo had found themselves on that other occasion. Then hardened-steel walls were about their persons, while there were stout hearts and strong hands to support them. But here—see the conditions under which they faced this horde of ruffians! True, the walls were stout enough, but for that one aperture now blocked with stones and boulders, and no doubt the granite blocks on which they lay would keep out bullets as well as would the armour of the cars which had created so much surprise amongst the enemy. But see the garrison! Amongst all these old men and youths, and women and children, there was hardly a stout or strong arm to be found, few who could be

said to know aught of rifles and fire-arms, while long oppression, fear of the very sight of these murderers, was almost sufficient to rob even the most courageous individual of all strength of purpose. Yes, indeed, as that band of murderers drew nearer, intent on carrying out the purpose of the Young Turk Party—those upstart individuals in Constantinople who had usurped the rightful power of the Sultan, and had done countless and terrible deeds in his name—as they came striding forward, they were certain and confident, feeling quite sure that, whether in the hamlet or in the fort, the people whose lives they sought would be just as helpless as little children.

When one came to think of it all, it was a clear stroke of fortune which found Guy Grammond there, in the heart of Asiatic Turkey, and discovered the garrulous, jovial Jo, that handy seaman, beside him, with Nicholas near at hand, and about them this mob of half-terrified Armenian people. It made Guy soliloquize a little, it caused Jo to grind his teeth, while Nicholas, watching with raised eyebrows and a certain air of polite astonishment about him, merely whistled.

“Good!” they heard him say. “If I were a Turk I should merely say: ‘Kismet. This is fate! And who can escape the fate that the gods have prepared for us?’”

If indeed it were fate, then fate is something in-

scrutable, and in this case depended not upon the action of the trio whose fortunes we are following—and indeed fate seldom depends upon individuals, but on a condition of affairs arising out of the actions of whole nations, guided no doubt by individuals. Let us pause for a moment just to look beyond the surface of affairs, and consider how it was that Guy and his friends travelling through this country came to be there at all, and why, seeing that they were there, they found themselves with enemies all about them.

The first of these considerations we may banish with a breath. Armageddon had commenced! The world was at war, and Russia and her allies, Great Britain, France, and the other nations, were at war with the Central Powers and Turkey.

Then let us come to the second of these points. Why, being in the heart of Asiatic Turkey, where Europeans were wont to travel in comparative safety, were Guy and his comrades now in a nest of enemies? Why, to be precise, was Turkey fighting against Russia, against the ally of Great Britain?

Were we to venture to explain the whole course of events which led up to Turkey's inclusion in this warfare, we might with reason and with advantage cover whole sheets of paper, and indeed exclude all mention of adventure; but the matter may be set down shortly and concisely, and yet with clearness, and here is an opportunity.

It was not Turkey who wished to go to war with Britain and her allies, it was Germany who commanded her to do so. More correctly, perhaps, it was German ambition and policy, the determination of the Kaiser to carve a road from Berlin to Constantinople, and thus to Bagdad and the Persian Gulf, which gave rise to that cunning conspiracy which suborned the Young Turk Party, and, for all the world may know, caused the rise to power of that ambitious party which undercut the authority of the Sultan, and, jingling gold beneath the nose of Enver Pasha and others of the Young Turk Party, flashing rewards and honours in their faces, and holding out glowing promises to them, caused them to throw in the lot of the Turkish nation with Germany and Austria. Not, be it noted, for the benefit of the Turkish nation itself, but, as we have indicated, for their own personal enrichment. In these few words one may briefly set down the reasons why Turkey entered into war with Russia, France, and Great Britain, and may give an explanation of the fact that Guy and his friends, now in the heart of Asiatic Turkey, were enemies—to be treated as such—murdered, maybe, with the unfortunate Armenians with whom they were now consorting.

But the bold statement that Turkey was at war with the Entente Powers, and that German conspiracy, rather than the aims and the wishes of the Turkish

nation had dragged her into the conflict, should be followed by some small indication of the events which preceded warfare, which followed the addition of the Sultan and his people to the forces of our enemies, and of the operations which had taken place up to the moment when Guy and this gallant crew of the British armoured-car detachment came over the Caucasian mountains and swooped down on to the plains of Turkey. To make even a short enumeration of those actions perfectly comprehensible, it needs that one should remind the reader at this stage that Turkey stands beside the Dardanelles, one foot in Asia as it were, and the other in Europe, overlooking that short yet narrow and rocky channel which winds from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and from which alone shipping can gain an exit from the shores of Russia to the world outside.

One needs to remember that Russia is a vast country, hemmed in on the north and east by inhospitable terrain, which, during long months of the year, is snow- and frost-bound. Her northern coast, which, but for the climate of those parts, would give free access to the ports of the world by means of the open seas, is nevertheless almost useless to her in the winter season, for then even the seas are frozen, while Petrograd is ice-bound. True, by means of gigantic efforts, by the use of special shipping with which to break the ice-floes, she is able, under favourable cir-

cumstances, to keep open a channel to Archangel on that north coast, and by that means can, even during the winter, under favourable circumstances, as we have already mentioned, keep in contact with outside people. Yet the disadvantages are great: the line of communication is a long one, and throughout its course, and on the seaboard, it is liable at any moment to interruption. But to the south, in the Crimea and along the coast of the Black Sea, Russia enjoys a more amenable climate, and were the Black Sea more or less open, like the Mediterranean, and Russian ports accessible to all the ports of the world without difficulty, the Muscovite people could not wish for more, and much fighting in past years and in these days would have been prevented. But the Turk—the sinister Turk—stands astride the Dardanelles, the only exit from the Black Sea; and the German, as we write, and for long years before it, is the master of the Sultan and his people, is rather, we should say, the conspirator who has set up a powerful party in Turkey, which has undercut the authority of the Sultan, and by bribery and flattery, by every sort of corruption, has induced that party to consider its own fortune first, and to play the game that Germany desires. In short, Germany wished not only a road to the Persian Gulf via Constantinople and Bagdad, desired not only to exploit the ungathered riches of Asiatic Turkey, but had other ambitious schemes in

her mind's eye. She desired to possess Persia, was determined to oust the British from Egypt, and finally to conquer India and all Great Britain's Eastern possessions. And, knowing that Russia and Britain might well come together, she saw to it, by taking firm hold of the Turk, that an impassable barrier was maintained between Russia and Great Britain. That solid block of Asiatic Turkey, that short, rocky, winding channel—the Dardanelles—was the barrier we mention. It divided Great Britain from Russia, and only when the Dardanelles were conquered, the Turks flung back, could Russia's millions join hands with King George's soldiers.

No need to mention how two German ships slipped from Wilhelmshaven in the very early days of this huge war, and sought the Dardanelles almost before we were ready—sought to join hands in fact with the Turkish fleet, and, so reinforcing it, to overwhelm the Russian Black Sea vessels. No need even to tell the reader that this cunning scheme proved abortive, and that the Russians, quickly exchanging broadsides with these German vessels, damaged them severely—so severely that the Russian Black Sea fleet remained the most powerful in those waters. There is no space in which to do more than remind the reader of that German invasion of Belgium, of the Teutonic torrent which poured down upon Paris, of the gathering of French and British armies, of the

stemming of that Germanic tide, and of the manner in which it was driven backwards. Hardly need to tell of the muster of German and Austrian troops along the eastern front of those countries, and of those first months of fighting, when, but for a serious reverse at Tannenberg, in East Prussia, the Russians beat back the Austrians, captured her Galician province to the very doors of Cracow, and well-nigh poured over the Germanic frontier.

Those were the early days of the war. There followed a species of dead-lock in France and Belgium, with terrific fighting in Russian Poland, resulting in a set-back to the Russians and the driving eastwards of their troops, till their domains were invaded, and the line of enemies stretched from Riga, on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea, to the marshes of the Pripet River, and thus to the Bukovina.

Nations paused for very lack of breath, and commenced to re-arm, to train more men, and to prepare for another more terrible phase of this warfare. Russia, hemmed in by those northern icy shores, hemmed in by the Turkish control of the Dardanelles to the south, was short of ammunition. Britain, striving to assist her, bombarded the Narrows at the Dardanelles, and threw some of her gallantest soldiers on to the Peninsula at Gallipoli; but the expedition, though it proved the magnificent bravery and fighting qualities of our troops and of our colonial comrades,

proved in the end expensive and abortive. Russia was still shut in, the Turks still stood across the outlet from the Black Sea.

Then the Russians flung their forces over the Caucasus passes, streamed down upon the Turks in Upper Armenia, and seized, by a brilliant stroke, and after most difficult and carefully prepared operations, the city of Erzerum and the whole of Upper Armenia. If she could not secure the Dardanelles by land and sea operations on the part of the British, she might yet secure Constantinople by her own land and sea warfare. She might march her splendid troops from Erzerum, along the southern coast of the Black Sea, and so gain her objective.

This was the expedition in which Guy and his friends were taking part. Erzerum was held—firmly held. Trebizond lay to the west. It was to discover where the main Turkish forces were congregated, what opposition might be expected, and where the blow might be best driven against the Turkish lines that our hero had ventured beyond the Russian outposts into this country.

And here he was—he, and Jo, and Nicholas—surrounded by these poor, wretched Armenians, who, if they failed to keep out that horde of rascals now banging at the gate of the fort, would be surely slaughtered.

CHAPTER X

Defending the Fort

"LET every man, woman, and child be careful to keep down below the top of the wall," Guy commanded, and ordered his message to be passed round among the people. "Not a man is to fire until I shout, and then only one single shot!"

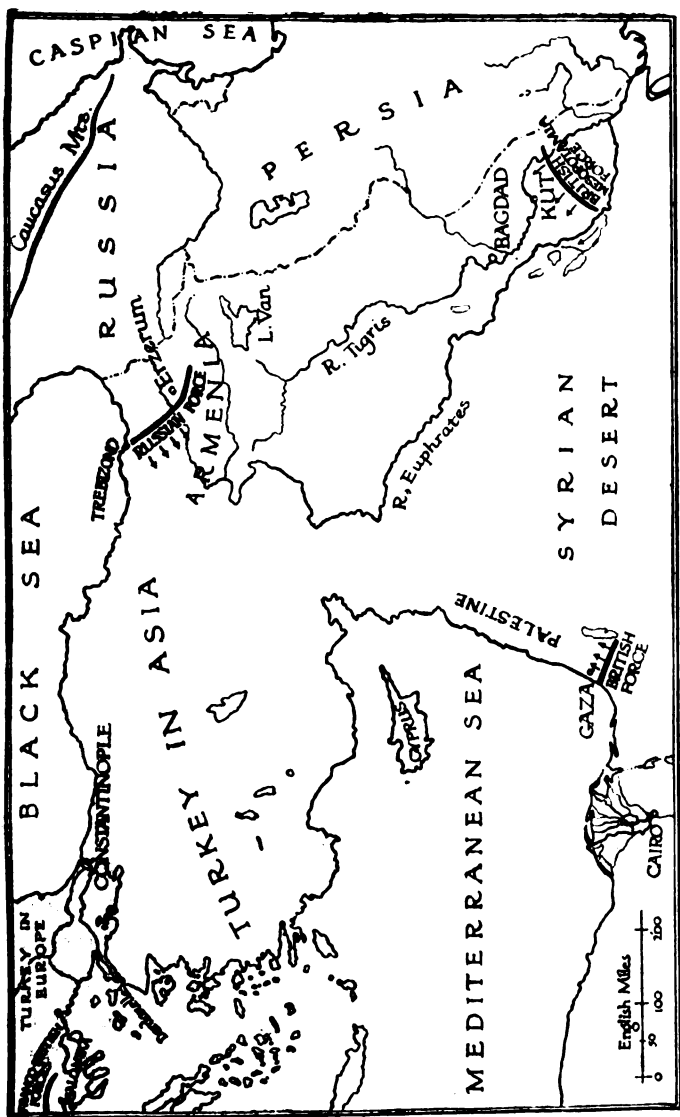
He crawled away from the position he had taken up and beckoned Jo to follow him, the two making their way along the top of the wall, which was of great thickness, till they came to the part where that single doorway—now blocked up with boulders—gave access to the interior. At this point, that narrow winding track leading down from the hamlet, along which the village folk had been in the habit of conveying their produce, reached the fort. Here, stretched on his face and peering from behind a couple of large stones, our hero looked down into the open space below; for the fort stood out in the open, with hardly a bush within sight, and with a space all round it which offered practically no shelter for an attacking-party. Indeed, it was an ideal place

in which to put up a strenuous defence against great odds, that is, provided the enemy was not possessed of artillery, which, posted at a safe distance, could, and would, easily batter the place about the ears of the defenders.

From many points of view, indeed, Guy and his friends had selected a spot which gave them many opportunities; and, had the handy-men of the naval armoured-car detachment which had gone to Russia to assist our allies been in possession, the hundred and more Turkish cavalry below, who at some miscreant's orders were patrolling the country and massacring the humble and helpless Armenians, would have been utterly useless. The handy-men would have laughed them to scorn, and, as likely as not, discarding and despising the protection given by these stout if ancient walls, would have made a sortie and scattered the Turks.

But here it was quite a different matter altogether, as one sees on considering the defenders. There were Guy and Jo and Nicholas, all able to hold a rifle and use it with precision, well-armed and supplied with ample ammunition—for the side-carriage of Jo's machine carried quite a stock—but look at the remainder of the defenders!

"Poor material!" Guy was forced to admit, as he glanced along the top of the wall and then down into the area below, into the centre of the fort. "Poor



SKETCH MAP SHOWING THE POSITIONS OF VARIOUS ALLIED FORCES IN THE EAST

C 886



beggars! There are very few of them who look as though they like the business or the prospects; but they are fighting with halters round their necks—it's fight or die in every case, and that will certainly spur them on and keep them going."

"Halt!"

That laughing, reckless band of Turks below pulled up their horses when within fifty yards of the barricaded door, while their leader urged his horse forward, the jingle of spur and bit coming to the ears of those on the top of the wall, and now and again gusts of laughter, sometimes shouts of merriment, interrupted here and there by the loud neighing of a horse. Then one voice was raised above all the others.

"Within there, ye people of the hamlet!" called the leader. "Listen, ye people! Ye who think to escape the mission of the Sultan, come out at once and return to your homes, that we may there do the bidding of our masters in seemly fashion. If ye refuse, if ye hide behind those stone walls, and think there to obtain protection, then all the worse for you. For, listen yet again. That mission that we come to do upon you shall be done in a manner that shall be doubly severe—we will hang every man of you to his door-post and nail your children to the floors."

"Ugh!" Guy shivered in spite of himself, while Jo looked inquisitively at him.

"What's the chap say?" he asked. "What's all

the talk about? Demons those fellows look—cruel-hearted brutes! And to think they've been murdering the people! To know it! For I looked down from the ridge yonder and saw them at their work. What's he say?"

Very rapidly Guy told him the gist of what passed, and translated literally the last words of the chief of those murderers.

"Pleasant sort of people!" he ventured, looking at Jo's stern face.

"Pah! Pleasant? Beasts!" exclaimed the sailor, lashing himself into a passion, yet not into a passion which caused him to shout or scream, or to indulge in abuse of those people, but into cold, calm, calculating anger which boded ill for the enemy.

He gripped the butt of his rifle and pushed it gently forward, peeped over the top of the stones till he caught sight of the chief down below, just outside the doorway, then he pulled back the weapon.

"No," he said, "no, not for me; but I'll mark him down when things get going after a bit. Brute though he is, I won't shoot him while he's parleying."

If the sailor had refined feelings, and treated this affair in the sporting manner loved by our sailors and our soldiers, the man below, the leader of this band of murderers—for indeed there was already sufficient evidence to prove that they were nothing more nor

less than murderers—had no such refined feelings. Indeed, peering upward, and suddenly catching sight of a man, he instantly drew a pistol from his belt and fired it, extracting a scream of pain from the unfortunate victim above. Then Guy knelt up.

“Fire!” he shouted, and immediately the old muzzle-loaders, antique rifles, and even blunderbusses poured their contents amongst the enemy.

As for Jo, he sprawled forward on the top of the wall till he was at its very edge, and, leaning over, careless of the bullets which spluttered about him—for the enemy had now opened fire, while that leader down below, pulling his horse round, took a snap shot at him—he took proper aim and sent the man rolling out of the saddle.

“One for him—one for us!” he cried as he crawled back into position. “Now what’ll they do? Bolt for it—eh? Murderers ain’t got too much pluck as a general rule when they come up against opposition.”

There had been for a few minutes quite a panic amongst the cavalry below, who, on discovering the death of their leader, had turned about and galloped away to a safe distance; but now they could be seen halted, massed in groups, while a number slipped from their saddles, and, coming together, talked the matter over. Then there was further movement, for all dismounted save thirty of the men, who, taking the reins of the horses, walked them back to the

hamlet, where they could be seen fastening them by the bridles to the doorposts.

“That looks as though they mean to make a siege of it,” said Guy; “they’ve left the horses, as they think, out of our range, and have placed a guard over them. I can see five men patrolling the street, while the rest are coming back to join their fellows. Of course, if we liked, we could tickle them up at this distance, for they are within easy range; but it seems to me that it would be better not to do so, for, though you showed up over the wall, Jo, they’ll hardly yet tumble to the fact that outsiders have joined these wretched people. No doubt they imagine that they’ve only got these humble and usually helpless Armenians to deal with—people so easily slaughtered. Indeed, I doubt whether they have ever met with such opposition before, for, by all accounts, they have massacred the Armenians without a single man raising a hand to defend himself or the women.”

The minutes that elapsed after that first outburst of firing, and the summons of the Turkish leader to the defenders of the fort to surrender, were occupied by Guy and his two friends in crawling along the walls and talking to the people, encouraging them by words where that was possible, and, in the case of Jo, who did not understand the language, by a series of signs, gesticulations, and grimaces which were distinctly humorous and of a somewhat nautical nature. Jo,

indeed, indulged in antics which were beyond all powers of description—which, indeed, his friends of the lower deck would have found extremely difficult to understand, but which in this case seemed to create a great impression. Old men smiled serenely at him, the youths, handling weapons for the first time in their lives perhaps—for the Armenian race is the reverse of pugnacious, and has little to do with military matters, and therefore with fire-arms—giggled at this jolly sailor, while women called to their children, pointing at Jo, and bade all and sundry see what a gallant man was this, what a strong shield he would prove, and how certain it was that they would come out of this encounter victorious.

“It’s wonderful!” said the old man who seemed to be head of the village to Guy and Nicholas as the two lay down near him. “A day since, but an hour ago—even less than that I think—and not one of us would have dared to raise so much as a finger against these miscreants. We stayed in our hamlet feeling helpless and hopeless, like sheep waiting for the knife of the butcher. From parts far away, from villages near at hand, tales have reached us of these monsters; while, but a day ago, a man staggered into the village—a man wounded to the death—who, before his life fled, gasped out his message: he was the last and only survivor of a hamlet such as this, where the miscreants had arrived at night-time, had fed on the

people's bounty, and, when they were rested and fed, had fallen upon them and killed them. Bah! We will fight here till there is not one left rather than submit to such treatment, and rather than see these helpless ones slaughtered."

"And so he will," Nicholas told Guy seriously, as they chatted together. "I've been watching these people during the last half-hour, and have seen a tremendous change in their appearance. At first, when those ruffians rode up to the fort and demanded their submission, I believe quite a large number of these poor wretches would have sat down and wailed, and allowed the Turks to break in the doorway and fall upon them. I suppose it's all habit; they have been so ill-treated for years that they are cowed, and they know all the time that these ruffians have no feelings, and that the life of an Armenian is absolutely nothing to them. So quite a number of them looked utterly cowed as the chief summoned them to surrender, and, when the first shot was fired, and the old man who was hit—above the doorway—shrieked, I saw men and women and youths and children positively trembling. Then Jo crept forward, and every eye seemed to fall upon him. Your shout awakened them all of a sudden, and I dare say those who fired closed their eyes as they pulled the triggers—indeed, I think they must have done, for beyond the leader of the party outside only two were hit, and they, I

imagine, by a pure fluke or by accident. But the result achieved did wonders. The very fact of having dared to fire upon these fellows, who have bullied them and treated them so badly in the past, bucked them up most splendidly. Some of them began to smile, those who had trembled most pulled themselves together, while I saw glances exchanged, and youths and old men patting one another on the back and congratulating their comrades. Look at 'em now! Don't look much like giving in without a struggle, do they?"

To be sure they did not, for as Guy cast a glance round the walls again, and down into the courtyard below, he too could not fail to appreciate the change which had come over these humble ill-treated people. The women were smiling, the children were even beginning to play in the courtyard, while old men and youths on the wall, and women stretched behind them with spare ammunition, were positively jubilant. They were chattering like a set of monkeys, and, despite Guy's warning, were now and again kneeling up and exposing their heads to the enemy. It was not, indeed, till shots rang out from the distance that they again took cover, and even then Guy and Jo, crawling from one part of the defence to the other, had to admonish severely some of the bolder spirits, lest the small number of defenders should be lessened by some foolish action.

"We shall want every one of you," Guy told them,

“and therefore why throw away a valuable life to these wretches outside by some foolish act—by kneeling up while there is protection to be obtained by lying flat on your faces? Let every man lie as close to the wall as he can; and, remember, no shot must be fired till I give the command again. Wait! They are sending a deputation forward.”

By now the Turkish cavalry could be seen bunched together some four hundred yards away, dismounted, and armed with rifles. A party of five men could be observed to leave their comrades and advance boldly into the open.

“Of course, we could break up the whole gathering,” said Guy, as he watched the men approaching; “but, as I’ve said before, it’s just as well not to let on yet that these villagers have received a British reinforcement. Sorry, Nicholas! By British, of course, I mean an Allied reinforcement. Those fellows will no doubt be coming to parley. Let’s get the old man over here, so that he can reply to them.”

By the time the enemy had arrived within easy shooting distance of the fort, the old man, who had hitherto headed the people of the hamlet, was stretched above the gateway, with Guy and Nicholas on either side of him. And now, at their bidding, he rose to his feet and stood there leaning on his rifle—a patriarchal figure—his long white beard flowing in the wind, his turban set back rather far on his head, and



"JO TOOK AIM AND SENT THE MAN ROLLING OUT OF THE SADDLE."

the loose folds of his garments setting off his big, gaunt frame. If Guy had thought this head-man dignified before, he thought it doubly now, for he held his head high and looked out unflinchingly yet calmly at the enemy.

"What would you?" he demanded in loud, ringing tones which had nothing of the aged man about them. "Speak! ye who come to disturb the peace of this hamlet, ye who have slaughtered our brothers and sisters in other places. What would you?"

The party down below halted, and, watching them, Guy saw, in spite of their truculence, a look of amazement, almost of fear, pass from one to the other. Then one of the five, no doubt already selected, came a little forward and held up his hand as if to ask for silence.

"Listen, old man above there!" he called out. "Listen, ye people who have dared to fire upon the Sultan's soldiers, and who have slain our leader! See him there, lying almost at your feet—his blood be upon your heads, and upon the heads of all your people. But I will now give you my message, and recollect that it is final! Come out now, you and your people who hide behind those walls, march back to your houses, and to-morrow, when we have fed and rested, we will select some of you for punishment for the offence that you have committed; the others shall go free—we swear that none of us shall molest them."

194 The Armoured-car Scouts

Guy glanced about him swiftly again, for the voice of this emissary carried to every part of the fort, and not a single man or woman or child there could fail to gather its meaning. Here was thrown out to them, was tossed above the walls, as it were, a chance for life. Let them surrender, let them march back to their houses, and the miscreants outside would spare some of them, and would select others for slaughter. But who, then, would they select? The old men, the young men, or the women? But, in any case, some only would be selected, and the rest would go free—for that was the promise. Here, then, was an opportunity to be seized. Some of them—the greater number—might yet live on and escape the violence which had ended in the death of so many of their kith and kin. A fluttering ray of light and hope flickered on some of the humble faces as Guy looked down upon them, and then was replaced within a minute by determination, by the same firmness which they had shown some few minutes before—a firmness strange to these unhappy, unfortunate, and browbeaten people. For the man—that dignified old fellow standing above the gateway—drew himself still more erect, and stood there, silhouetted against the blue sky, his long white beard blowing in the wind, his evenly-chiselled face clearly outlined, and his firm features directed towards the enemy.

“You ask us to believe the words of men who have

slaughtered our brothers and our sisters?" he asked in cold, scathing tones. "You call upon us, who are breathing here in safety, at least for the moment, to open wide this doorway, to fling the boulders we have placed there to either side and invite you to enter? And for that act on our part you promise! Listen! my people behind! They promise—what? That the lives of some of you shall be spared, that the lives of others selected from amongst you shall be sacrificed. It is a promise—only a promise! Hearken, my brothers and sisters: when before has the promise of one of these dogs been worth the breath wasted upon it?"

The faces turned up towards the old man shone now with a different light, with firmness of purpose, almost with eagerness, for this bold defiance of the enemy—a dreaded enemy—made them marvel, and then of a sudden filled them with enthusiasm, for, lo and behold! the old man still stood there unharmed, defiant, in spite of those men outside. A second later a sharp report rang out, and the value of the promise of the miscreants outside was evidenced by the bullet which one of them sent hurtling at the figure of the man standing on the wall above him—a figure which remained in the same position, unflinching, and, by a miracle, unharmed. Yet the shot—that dastardly shot—added to the work which the influence of Guy and his friends, and the strange dignity of the aged

196 The Armoured-car Scouts

man, had already accomplished. It made the defenders of the fort as defiant as their chief, and, more than that, filled them with anger as well as hatred of the Turks. Unbidden by Guy, forgetting to wait for his orders, they poured a volley at close range into the party beneath and exterminated every one of their number.

"That gives 'em our answer better than anything else," Guy said, when the thing was done, peering down at the bodies stretched in front of the gate. "It ain't quite the sort of thing I like; for, if a party comes forward to parley in front of a besieged fortress, it isn't quite playing the game to shoot 'em down, even if they are the first to open fire. Still, what would you? We're not fighting altogether civilized individuals. This isn't a quarrel between the Central Powers and their Turkish ally, and Russia and the Entente Powers, it's a fight for existence on the part of these unfortunate Armenians, and one imagines it will become a desperate fight on the part of the men outside to carry out their purpose, and, more than all, to avenge themselves on people they have looked upon hitherto as utterly helpless and harmless."

"They're a-goin' to do something, that's sure, Mr. Guy," sang out Jo a little later. "I've been a-watch-in' o' them spawn, and, if you'll believe me, there's something on—something artful. At first when the old boy talked to 'em—talked big, I should say,

though I couldn't understand his meaning—and when that shot was fired and was answered by our fellows, there was a rush on the part of every man outside. But someone called 'em back, and now I notice that twenty or more have gone up to the hamlet, and have been streaming back ever since. Look at 'em now—behind that patch of trees yonder—what are they carrying or pushing? Looks almost like a gun.”

. He flung his glasses up to his eyes and peered for some little while before he was able to offer a definite opinion, while Guy also inspected the group which Jo had pointed out.

“Not a gun,” he told the sailor a little later on; “at least I think not. It looks to me as though they'd got hold of the trunk of a tree or a big beam and had placed it upon some trolley, perhaps upon a little hand-cart used by one of the villagers.”

“And what will that be for?” demanded Jo. “A large block of timber carried upon a hand-cart! Now if that had been a ladder—a long ladder—with which to scale the walls it would be more likely! Are you sure, Mr. Guy? I don't make out any block of timber.”

And yet without a doubt Guy had made no error; for, within a few seconds, when their preparations were fully made, the group behind the patch of cover marched into the open, and it was seen that they were indeed pushing a heavy length of timber, and

were advancing directly for that spot where the defenders had blocked up the gateway. Some forty men fell in beside the hand-cart, while the rest dispersed, and presently, as the central party got within easy distance of the fort, opened a severe fire upon the defenders, having meanwhile hidden behind rocks and boulders surrounding the place.

"Let every man take care to keep his head well below cover," sang out Guy at once, standing up himself nevertheless so as to have a complete view of the operations. "Fortunately those fellows are still down below us, and if only you will keep yourselves flat on the top of the wall, and erect a parapet in front of you, you will be safe from their bullets. As to returning their fire, don't trouble to do so for the moment, for, in the first place, we haven't too much ammunition, and few of you have weapons sufficiently good to carry that distance accurately."

Bullets were bobbing against the outside wall by then, thudding against the granite, or hitting angles and flying off at a tangent, ricochetting and screaming, hurtling over the heads of the defenders. Meanwhile, too, the central party, pushing the hand-cart before them, advanced steadily upon the gateway, now filled up with boulders.

"Of course they mean to batter it in if they can," said Guy, as he and Jo discussed the matter eagerly. "Slip down below, Jo, and see if you can find a crevice

through which you can fire—a few point-blank shots on your part would soon stop those beggars. I'll go along the wall to either end of this place and will put my best marksmen there, as from that position they will be able to fire down upon them without exposing themselves unnecessarily."

It was perhaps a minute later that there was a bang down below, as the enemy overturned the cart and threw the block of timber to the ground; then some thirty of them picked it up, and, advancing till close to the wall, swung it backward, and then brought it with a thud against the obstruction which barred their entrance to the fortress. Almost at the same instant, a shot rang out from the right-hand corner of the fort, where a young Armenian—merely an overgrown boy—had hurriedly erected a rampart of stones before him, leaving a narrow aperture in its midst, through which he was able to fire down upon the enemy. A man dropped—the man nearest the wall of the fort—while a second later a shot rang out from the left, where Guy was directing operations; then came the sharp report of Jo's rifle, followed by a scream outside, and by hoarse shouts of anger. Two men had fallen, but their comrades were none the less determined. The beam thudded against the boulders with such force that some of them tumbled backwards into the fortress. Crash! it went again, and more fell, till it seemed certain that an entrance

would be forced—as though even the fortress would be taken.

It was at that precise and precarious moment that Nicholas came to the rescue. Dashing down from the top of the wall, he shouted to the women in the courtyard to hurry forward, and, setting them an example, began to throw boulders up to replace those which had fallen from the gateway. Yet it seemed as though the enemy would break in after all, for the beam continued to thud heavily against this temporary barrier, seeming to jerk more stones out of position than the people within could replace. But there were others to have a hand in the proceedings. Up to then but three shots had rung out—those two from either flank of the fort, and the one which Joe had fired from behind the barrier. Now, however, spurred by the signs of danger, a dozen men leant over the edge of the wall, and, careless of those long-range shots fired at them by the enemy lying all round, aimed at the attacking-party down below. Old blunderbusses, muskets rusted with age and neglect, and breech-loaders which were of antique pattern opened at point-blank range, while a roar shook even the walls of that stout fortress. It was answered by howls of rage and fear, by the stampeding of those who remained of the attacking-party, and then by shrill yells of triumph on the part of the defenders.

An hour later, having no doubt discussed the situa-

tion in the meanwhile, the enemy once more returned to the attack, and for the second time were beaten off with heavy losses. Then the dusk began to fall, and, as it did so, Guy and Jo and Nicholas, gathering together, watched those miscreants outside as they laboured to accomplish their purpose. The sound of much hammering came from the village; men had been seeking high and low for timbers and dragging them from the houses, while a little later it became evident that a number of scaling-ladders had been constructed—rough, no doubt, and perhaps heavy, yet long enough to reach to the top of the low-built walls of the fortress, and capable of providing a means whereby the men outside, now filled with a deadly fury, could gain the summit and beat down the feeble efforts of the defenders.

It was a difficult and a dangerous situation, and as darkness fell, and the moment for an attack in force drew nearer, Guy found himself pacing the top of the wall, careless of the danger he ran of tumbling over, puzzling his brains, wondering what to do, and how to act to avert this coming danger.

CHAPTER XI

Guy, Jo, and Nicholas

PERCHED on the top of the stout wall of the fortress in which the humble Armenians had taken refuge, Guy and Nicholas and Jo held a council of war, as the darkness increased and night fell over the country. That aged man, the head of the hamlet to which they had come so opportunely that afternoon, the dignified old fellow who had so gallantly addressed the enemy outside—those brutal Turks sent to massacre the people—squatted near at hand, listening intently, though he could not understand the strange language they were speaking, yet not venturing to interrupt the councils of these three strange young men who had come as a veritable godsend to him and his brethren. At length Guy turned to him and spoke in low tones, for it was necessary to be cautious always, lest a sound should draw the bullets of the sentries the enemy had placed all round the fort; and, perhaps more than all, to be silent so that the watchers beside them, the sentries lying there listening for the approach of the enemy, should be able to detect the first sounds of their coming, and so warn the combatants.

"Tell me, old man," said Guy at length, "what you would do under these circumstances? Outside there are still perhaps a hundred of the enemy, and, here within, little more than fifty old men and boys, and perhaps the same number of women and children. How, then, are the fifty I first mentioned to withstand the onslaught of the enemy as they mount their ladders and gain the top of the wall?"

"Only by hard and desperate fighting, only by placing their faith in themselves can they," was the instant answer; "there is no other way that I know of by which these humble people here can beat off those fiends."

"Hold hard! Go astern a moment, Mr. Guy. I'm thinking."

Jo struck his seamed and lined forehead with one broad heavy palm, and sat there in the darkness for a while without speaking further. It was perhaps a minute later that he grabbed at Guy, causing our hero to give a violent start and make ready for an encounter; then, realizing that it was the sailor, to press his hand in return and encourage him to give his opinion.

"Well, then," he asked, "what is it, Jo? How are we to act? Speak up, and quickly!"

"It's like this, then, Mr. Guy. I've been putting myself in the place of those demons outside there, and have been wondering how I'd act supposing I

was like them, and had a grudge to work off on these poor folks here that we're commanding. You can reckon that if they can only get to the top of the wall, and shoot or knock down a few of the first they come upon, they know very well that the rest of the defenders will throw down their arms and will howl for mercy. It's their way, sir; they can't help it. Why, if we was to clear off at this moment, the chances are that in spite of this old boy 'ere—and he's a good plucked 'un, I know—the whole lot would give up the fighting, and would just wait like lambs to be slaughtered."

"Quite so," Guy agreed with him, while Nicholas nodded violently.

"It's just as Jo says," he agreed. "The heart has been knocked out of these poor wretched people by long years of oppression and brutality, and by the knowledge that their lives are nothing to the Turks, that the latter detest them, and, more than all perhaps, by the fact that a general massacre has been taking place all over the country, and that the men outside have definite orders to slay every individual in this hamlet. You'd feel disheartened, Guy, if you were in their position; you'd feel inclined to cave in and shriek for mercy, or to go to the slaughter like a lamb—now wouldn't you?"

"I should," Guy admitted promptly. "I'd be prepared to shriek at the sight of a Turk, I'm sure. But,

one moment—we're delaying Jo. Get along with it, Jo, for time's precious."

"Well, then, Mr. Guy, I put myself in the place of those brutes outside. They've got their ladders, they've put them up against the wall, and have sent their most active men up them. The defenders are making a fight of it at first; guns are going off; there are shouts and shrieks, and these Armenians are falling; it's dark all round, so that if they happen to hit some of the enemy they can't see what success they've had—and, after all, it's by seeing your success that you're heartened. So the people will cave in, as Mr. Nicholas says, and no blame to 'em. But—and here I come to the thing I thought of—supposing, Mr. Guy, there was a diversion?"

"A diversion? How? Where?" asked our hero eagerly.

"Like this," went on the sailor. "Remember I'm one of the enemy outside for the moment; I've massed my men down below the wall, just outside, beyond range of boulders, and safe for the most part from the fire of the defenders; I've got my ladders up and my storming-party are gaining their object. It's then, sir, that I'm set all of a tremble and all my plans are upset by a diversion—by an attack from outside, by a sudden volley at close quarters. You've got the hang of my meaning—eh, Mr. Guy? Supposing, now, you or I, or both of us, were to slip over the

wall—not this wall, you'll understand, but yonder—accompanied by a dozen of the most venturesome of these people, each one of them armed with the biggest blunderbuss he can find—the sort of thing that makes a lot of noise and which kills when fired at close quarters. Supposing we wait till the ladders are up and the enemy have started storming the fort, and then we open a heavy fire, shout as though there were a large number of us, and then reload and open again on them.”

It was Guy's turn to stretch out a hand and grip the sailor's arm till even that hardy fellow almost winced.

“Stop!” said Guy. “Splendid! First-class! It's a brilliant idea! Nicholas, what do you think of it?”

“It's like Jo,” came from the Russian. “He'll be the one to carry out the move, for he's got lots of dash and plenty of courage.”

“Then tell us, old man, what you think of this plan,” said Guy, addressing the chief of the hamlet. “Our friend here suggests that we should lower a party from the wall—an easy enough matter, for I know that we've ropes in plenty. The party will be armed with blunderbusses, and will fire into the enemy at close quarters as they use the ladders, and their bullets and the fire of those up here, will, we hope, upset the enemy considerably.”

It was a minute or more before the old Armenian replied, and during that time he squatted there close

to them, quite motionless, practically invisible, for now dense darkness had descended. At length he spoke—quietly, in that dignified manner he had adopted during the day, measuring his sentences as it were, as if jealous of every word he uttered.

“It is well! It is well, my friends! This scheme promises great things for my poor people. So good is it, that a peace-loving man such as I am—such as are, indeed, all my brothers—can scarce add one solitary suggestion to it. And yet, as I think, I see other movements which may be of advantage. Listen, then, and I will speak my thoughts. There are poles down below in the courtyard, with forked tops—for the women have used them for stringing ropes for their linen—we will place our stoutest youths along the walls armed with those poles, and they shall hook the ladders and push them away from the fort. Yet another plan: the women below shall be brought in to assist us; they shall carry more boulders to the wall, and, as the storming-party clambers up and the others congregate beneath us, they shall throw these boulders amongst them; and finally—for I have a third suggestion—we will send a couple of our boys—good boys, whom I know have plenty of dash and courage—and they shall fire weapons among the horses picketed there in the village, cut the ropes of as many as they can reach, and stampede them if possible.”

The old man ceased to speak, leaving Guy and his friends pondering, delighted at his suggestions. Then, having conversed for some few moments longer, and laid their plans carefully, the party broke up, the old man threading his way along the wall, and selecting individuals, whom he called by name, from amongst their fellows. It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that Jo was lowered over the far wall, his foot in the loop of a stout rope, and a dozen women at the tail end of it. After him went twelve young fellows, merely youths, who, fired by his example, and aching to relieve their parents of all danger, eagerly accepted the task demanded of them. By then, too, the women were streaming up from the courtyard, silently, grimly determined to carry out their part of the defence of the fortress. And, lastly, two boys, merry young fellows as a general rule, but now rendered sober by the danger all about them, slid down a couple of ropes left dangling from the rear wall of the fort, and disappeared in the darkness.

During the minutes which followed—anxious moments for Guy and his friends—there was, as can be imagined, a great deal of movement both within and without the fort. Flat on the wall above the gate, where sounds of movement outside made it evident that the storming-party would most likely make its attempt, men were creeping close to the edge, so that they could easily fire over, while women were still

streaming up and down those stairs which led from the courtyard, and were feeling their way along the walls as they carried baskets and bags of broken stones and moderate-sized boulders. Hardly a man or woman spoke, though now and again a child cried down in the courtyard—perhaps frightened by the absence of its mother.

Who would have imagined that outside, too, there was so much movement? For there, too, there was almost complete silence, though the sharp ears of the listeners on the wall heard sounds now and again as of a body of men stealthily creeping nearer. No one, in any case, would have suspected that at the right-hand corner of the fort, squeezed close up to the wall, sat a dozen youngsters burning with impatience, and at their head the active figure of Jo, the sailor. As for the two youngsters who had sped off into the darkness, they knew every foot of the way, and, creeping across the open patch of ground outside the fort, and gaining a meadow, they soon reached the stream which bubbled near at hand, and forded it. Then they reached the first house of the village, and, passing it, halted for a while at the edge of the main street, from which point they could hear horses stamping and the occasional voices of the small guard left there to watch them. Then they flitted across the street, slid behind the houses, and presently had taken up an advantageous post from which they could fire either

into the picketed horses or into the guard, now seated round the fire which they had built behind one of the cottages. Thus all was in readiness, but barely so, when the increased sounds near the fort told that the enemy was indeed advancing.

“Pass the word along to every man and woman to make ready,” said Guy in low tones, speaking into the ear of the old man. “I’ve posted a party of four at each corner of the fort,” he told Nicholas, “and their duty is to watch carefully for an attempt to scale the walls elsewhere than along this front portion. If they hear a ladder being raised they are to try to push it off, and if they fail they are to call for assistance. What’s that down there? I thought I saw someone moving. Listen, now! That was one of the ladders falling from the hands of the people carrying it.”

Those were tense moments for the people stretched flat on the walls of the fort which the Turks were about to attack, and tense moments perhaps for the enemies themselves; for, though the Turks despised the wretched Armenians whom they were slaughtering, and were accustomed to carry out their murderous work without any danger to themselves, the defence which Guy’s comrades had already put up had somewhat alarmed them. The firm tones of the old man had given them a warning, and they realized that, until they could gain the top of the walls, all

would not be plain sailing; but once there they expected the defenders to submit instantly, and to cry for mercy.

"Mercy!" said one of them just before they moved off to the attack, speaking scornfully to the others; "yes, we will give them mercy, once we have gained the top of the wall and are in amongst them. Listen now! Not a man, not a woman, not a child is to leave the place alive. Kill them all—every one of them."

There was another loud sound outside, as the end of one of the ladders carried by the storming-party struck against the base of the wall, then the end was lifted, grated its way upwards against the granite blocks, and finally rested on the upper edge. It was just at that moment that sounds on the left distracted Guy for the moment, and, turning his head, he listened intently. There came a sharp exclamation of astonishment, a woman's shrill voice, the sound of breaking timber, and then loud calls of fear, followed by the clatter and clash of a falling body.

"Master! Master!" a diminutive figure called to him a few seconds later, and, bending, Guy found a small boy beside him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"A messenger from over there—from the left," the youngster told him. "They tried to mount the wall with one of their ladders. The ladder was covered

212 The Armoured-car Scouts

with those Turks, and then I and my mother, and a youth who is related to us, used one of the poles and threw it backward. Ha, ha! It was magnificent!"

The boy gloated over their triumph. And if only Guy could have seen his face—a usually pallid, half-starved face—he would have seen that it was glowing, and that the youngster was as proud as any peacock. Patting him on the head, and thankful to know that one attempt to outflank the garrison had failed, he turned all his attention now to the front, for, undoubtedly, the main attack was to be made on the wall beneath which lay the blocked-up gateway, and it was there that the greatest danger threatened. That one ladder which had been thrust upward was followed by two or three more, and as Guy moved to his left—to the centre of this new disturbance—he could hear men and youths panting on either side of him, and he became aware of the fact that figures—the figures of women—were standing quite close to the edge of the wall, breathing heavily as they hurled boulders down upon the enemy. A sharp crack told that one of the poles, used to support the clothes-lines of these humble villagers, had broken in half with the strain imposed upon it, and was followed by a loud bang as the top of the ladder against which it had been prised, relieved of the push by the breaking of the pole, came back against the wall with force. Then there came a sharp cry from some unlucky individual

standing on that ladder—one of a dozen at least—who was shaken from his hold and fell with a thud to the ground beneath. Commencing with such sounds, and with an occasional cry, the conflict between the ruffians outside and the humble Armenians rapidly waxed more furious. Men on either side began to shout, while sharpshooters, stationed in strategic positions before the darkness came on, sent their shots hurtling against the fort. Then weapons were fired by the defenders—a sharp snap and a flash telling of a rifle at one spot; the loud bellowing roar of a blunderbuss, one of the ancient fire-arms possessed by the inhabitants of the village—a blunderbuss which, when fired, lit up the whole surroundings for the space of a few seconds—making itself heard, angrily as it were, as it sent a spluttering, expanding discharge of pebbles, and odds and ends of metal scrap, in amongst the attackers. Those shots, and the steady fall and thud of boulders hurled by the women, had a wonderful effect, while the tipping up and throwing backwards of two at least of the ladders, the howls of the storming-party cast away with them, and their resulting descent to the ground with unexpected violence, were already having an influence upon the dash and determination of the rascals.

“It just wants that diversion of Jo’s, and the stampeding of the horses, to set them running,” Guy shouted in Nicholas’s ear, for the Russian now stood beside

214 The Armoured-car Scouts

him. One moment, indeed, Guy would be at the far corner of the wall, gripping the top of one of those roughly made ladders, exhorting the people to defend themselves, shouting to them that they were succeeding; at the next he would be back perhaps at the other, exhorting the youths to aim as well as they could, to fire slowly and steadily, and make every bullet tell. And now, panting with his exertions, watchful of every sound, he was standing in the very centre, over the blocked-up gateway, with Nicholas—revolver in hand—close beside him.

“Wait! What’s that? Your diversion?” called the latter, when Guy had hardly ceased speaking, or, to be precise and exact, when Guy had hardly finished gasping, for he had little breath left for words. “Listen!” cried Nicholas.

“Listen!” chimed in the old man of the village, who, like Guy, had been flitting from one of the walls to the other, exhorting his people. “Those boys whom we sent to the village are carrying out their work—those are their shouts. Hear the guard posted by the enemy shouting for mercy! And—yes—those are the hoofs of galloping horses!”

By now there was quite an uproar in the almost deserted village from which these humble Armenians had fled earlier in the day, and, as our friends listened, they heard, first of all a roar, as those two gallant boys fired their blunderbusses, then came shrieks—

shrieks of agony—while, could they have been posted beside those boys, they would have discovered both of them lying flat at the base of one of the houses—not of their volition, but because the recoil of their weapons had driven them there. Shaken, breathless from their exertion and their excitement, the youngsters very soon pulled themselves together, shouting at the top of their voices, and dashed forward to the horses. Pulling out their knives, they soon severed the headropes of the nearest animals, and, in the space of a few minutes, had perhaps twenty of them galloping down the street. It was then their turn to pause, seeing that the other beasts were picketed at a little distance, and they must needs find their way to the spot and discover whether guards were posted there. And in the meanwhile they had turned their heads towards the fort where their mothers and their brothers were fighting, and listened to the shouts, fearful that those triumphant yells were proceeding from the enemy. But they need have had little fear, for, hardly had their own huge weapons spoken and knocked them backwards, when the turmoil at the fort was suddenly increased by a rattling discharge of weapons.

“Follow me!” Jo had whispered to the little force put in his command, and, though none could understand his words, all realized their meaning. “Now creep out into the open and separate a little, and mind, none of you youngsters is to pull a trigger till I open

fire. Then go at 'em hot and strong, and reload as fast as you are able. Now then, stupid!" he flashed, turning on the youth immediately behind him, "do you want to blow my head off with that weapon? No, I'm sure you don't. Well, then, keep its muzzle turned up in the air, and don't be rapping me over the head with it."

What shouts there were from the garrison of the fort, what yells of rage and fear from the attackers! That sudden pandemonium in the village had disturbed the leader of these Turks more, perhaps, up to that moment than had the failure of his storming-party, and, puzzled by the occurrence, he was wondering what action to take when the diversion provided by Jo and his little party disturbed him still further. More than that, it sent him away behind his men, severely wounded, leaving the storming-party, the sentries, and the surviving Turks to fight the Armenians without a leader.

"Pelt them with boulders, shoot at them, fire your hardest!" bellowed Guy, seeing that matters had taken a turn in their favour.

From the right-hand corner of the fort he heard Jo give a sharp order, and, a little later, as rifles flashed on either side of him, heard another volley of sounds burst from the little party. It was immediately after this that Jo's voice was raised still higher above the din.

"Charge!" Guy heard him bellowing. "Pull out

your knives! Use your rifle-butts! Use your fists!—your boots!—anything! Charge! Forward!”

“Stop throwing those boulders! Tell our people to be careful of our friends down below,” Guy warned the old man, and, separating from him, himself went along the wall to repeat the order. A minute later he gave a loud command for the firing-party to raise their muzzles. “Cease fire,” he shouted, “for I think that the Turks have bolted, and unless we are careful we shall shoot down some of our comrades. Jo! Ahoy! Jo!” he called out.

“Aye, aye, sir!” came from a point some distance from him. “You can tell ’em up there to hold their fire and sit down and take a breather,” the sailor shouted. “Those ruffians have gone—bolted—I believe, Mr. Guy, skedaddled for their lives, and small blame to ’em.”

Five minutes later, the sailor and Guy and Nicholas were holding a hurried council of war with the headman of the village, while the party of youths who had gone out with Jo had been hoisted into the fort again.

“The question is, then, what are we to do now?” began Guy when sentries had been posted and silence had again settled over the surroundings. “The report is that these people have bolted, and one of those youngsters who so gallantly went to the village tells us that they did not dare to enter, also that, though he

and his friend stampeded quite a number of horses, the bulk still remain there, picketed at the farther end of the village. Now, what do we do?"

"It were wise, my friend, to send out scouts at once," the old man told him solemnly. "Last night I would not have dared to suggest such a proceeding, seeing that there was no man here, no youth, and no woman who would have dared to undertake such an order. But what a change! These people of mine, so docile, so down-trodden, so fearful—almost of their own shadows—but a few hours ago, are now filled with courage and love of fighting. It is you, my friends, you who have put heart into these people, you who have taught them that they are a match even for the bloodthirsty ruffians who have attacked them. Yes, even though a thousand Turks return to take us, we here will sell our lives dearly, and no longer will go down out of this fort to be slaughtered without a struggle. So, if I but call for volunteers, there are numbers of youths here who know every path, every yard of the ground hereabouts, who will willingly go on a scouting expedition. That done, we are protected ourselves against a sudden attack, and can wait the dawn with confidence."

It proved to be just as the old man had said, and indeed was a matter of no great surprise to our hero and his friends, for the transformation in these usually humble and terrified people was immense, now that

they had crossed swords with the miscreants sent out to destroy them. Hardly had a call for volunteers been made when twenty or more youths, flushed with success and filled with ambition to do greater deeds, came forward.

"We ask for scouts to go out and trace the wretches who attacked us, to tell us of the path they took, and to watch for others who may be coming. It is dangerous work," said the old man.

"Dangerous, no doubt, yet we will joyfully undertake it," answered one of the youths, the eldest amongst them. "Let us go at once, my father, and we will guarantee that you and the women and children may sleep in peace, without fear of a sudden and unexpected attack during the hours of darkness. By dawn we will return, leaving some of our number stationed far out, and these can be relieved by others later."

The volunteers were at once divided up into small parties, and, having received food from the stores down below, and each one of them a weapon, they were lowered over the walls as silently and as swiftly as possible, and promptly sped off into the darkness.

"The rest of us may just as well turn in," said Guy when they had gone, and all had strained their eyes vainly to follow their movements. "We'll post a man at each corner of the fort and one in the centre of each wall—of course, we must have another just

inside the blocked-up gateway, for a cunning enemy might pull the boulders down without our hearing. Then men, women, and children had better lie down wherever they can find a comfortable spot, and put in as much sleep as possible."

"And in the meanwhile," asked Nicholas curiously, "what then? Do we go on defending the fort for ever? Do we stand by these people till they are eventually attacked by an overwhelming force of these ruffians?"

"Certainly!" declared Jo. "It would be treachery to desert them!"

"And yet we have other duties," Guy reminded his comrades. "Just wait a moment while I talk to the old man, and see whether he has made any plans for the future. What about to-morrow?" he asked him, as he filled his pipe and set a match to it. "Supposing, old man, the enemy are no longer in sight when the dawn comes, and our scouts report that the country round about is clear of them—what then? I and my friends have done what we could in this matter, and are willing to give further assistance if it is possible and of use to you, but still we have our other duties to perform, and are here on a special mission. Doubtless you have thought this matter over."

"And have come to a decision, my friend," the old man told him without hesitation. "A great plan has come into my head—one which the newly found cour-

age of this people will help them to carry out. I have thought the matter over thoroughly, and can see that, whereas to-morrow we are free, and almost certainly will be left alone, the next day will bring an attack by a larger force of these murderers—if not then, the next day of a certainty they will return, and there is a limit to our powers of endurance. But my plan—listen to it, my friend. There are horses in that village—forty, perhaps fifty of them—and each one of us can ride, whether it be man, woman, or child. Then I propose that at the first streak of dawn, when we have fed and our scouts have returned, we mount all the aged and the most feeble and set off from this place. We will take a route south, where I have heard that Armenians—our brothers and sisters, that is—have taken refuge in the mountains, and where, indeed, they have defied the anger of the Turks, and have beaten off all those who have attempted to reach them. Mayhap we shall encounter the enemy on the road, and there fall to their violence; but mayhap good fortune will follow us all the way, and we shall meet and join with those people. It is but a plan, my friend, but a plan and action following it are better than no movement. To sit here is to be slaughtered! To go—to set out for the south—gives us a chance of life and happiness!”

At daylight on the following morning some of the scouts returned, reporting that the enemy had been

The Armoured-car Scouts

widely scattered, and that, but for a few who had died on the road, having been severely wounded, the rest were gone entirely. Also there came the report that in the village there were some fifty-five horses, picketed by the Turks, still remaining, and amongst them five of their guard, slain by the blunderbusses of the two boys who had been sent there to create a diversion.

It was not a time for delay or for hesitation, and at once there was bustle amongst the garrison of the fort. The boulders were turned away from the gateway, the people ate an early meal as hurriedly as possible, and then, gathering up their few possessions, and mounting the most feeble upon the beasts they had captured, they all set off towards the south, the old man at their head, youths and the most active spread out far on the flanks and in rear, so as to guard against a surprise, and give the main party warning in case the enemy were seen. Guy and Nicholas and Jo watched their departure from the gate of the fort, and waved to them as the cavalcade wound its way round a hill and finally passed out of sight.

"And good luck to them! They fought right well!" said Guy. "Now, boys, we've got to go on with our own business."

CHAPTER XII

A Stern Chase

WHAT a load was removed from the shoulders of Guy and his friends, to be sure, as they heard the motors of their bicycles humming again, as they sat astride their machines and felt the keen, spring-like air of Asiatic Turkey singing past their ears! Yes, it was a load removed from their minds, to feel that they had freed themselves from all responsibility as to the safety of those unfortunate Armenians with whom they had so unexpectedly come in contact. Looking back upon that adventure, Guy was forced to admit that, if he had known beforehand what was to happen, he would have hesitated; for see the risks they ran—the danger of being killed or captured, and thus failing to carry out successfully the mission entrusted to them.

When all three had exchanged opinions on the matter, it was agreed without dissent that, if fortune took them to another village in similar circumstances, they would be forced to help the people, and quite frankly all three expressed a strong hope that no such call would be made upon them.

"For we have this work, haven't we?" Nicholas asked, as he lit his cigarette and smiled in his pleasant way. "I think you will agree with me, you chaps, that we've something else to do than to slay murderers. If you will remember our instructions were to make a dash into the country to ascertain where the Turkish troops were concentrated, to learn as much as possible of their disposition, and then to return at the quickest moment with fullest information. Well, we don't seem to have wasted much time, do we?"

"Could hardly have pushed on any faster," agreed Guy. "But of course we've jeopardized our chances to a great extent. Consider the point: there are perhaps sixty or more ruffians scattered about the country, who, besides vowing vengeance on us, will inform their chiefs of what happened at the fort, and of the presence there of three strangers."

"Hold hard!" shouted Jo. "But will they, Mr. Guy? Did they see three strangers, those murdering devils? I grant you that you and Mr. Nicholas, and I too, bobbed up amongst the Armenians and fired on the enemy; but when a fight like that's going on, and men stand the chance of being killed and wounded, when two parties get, as you might say, at boarding distance, then little things like differences in dress pass unnoticed, and, after all, many of these Armenians wore clothes not greatly unlike these we are wearing."

When they came to consider that point too, it was

quite clear that Jo's suggestion had weight behind it. Yet the chances were that one or more of those rascals who had attacked the fort had noticed the presence of strangers—of Europeans—amongst the Armenians; and, if they had done so, then it was quite certain that they would spread the tale, that superior officers would hear of it, and that there would follow a hue and cry to hunt out the three who could have come to that part for no other reason than to spy upon the Turks and learn of their arrangements. Nicholas nodded wisely and sucked reflectively at his cigarette.

"It is more than likely that they know a great deal about us, for we have forgotten the fact that after we left our outposts we were spotted; and it may very well be that, when we turned and slipped off through that valley, and finally swung to our right again and came left, some Turkish outpost stationed on a hill saw us, wondered who or what we were, and reported it to his superior. Oh yes, I don't think that we can imagine that we've escaped notice! Well, all the better! Perhaps there will be more fun and excitement about this business."

There was not a soul in sight as they swept the country from the summit of that hill, and, mounting again, their engines humming and purring splendidly, the three sped on along a road which was free of stones and boulders, and which cut directly across open country, providing a remarkably smooth surface

considering that it was a mere track, and allowing rapid progress. The wheels of the machines revolved at a great rate, the exhausts of the engines spluttered and rattled like machine-guns, while the riders tucked their heads down and bent forward, and the air sang past their ears and caused every tag and corner of their clothing to flutter. An hour later they had accomplished twenty or more miles of their journey, and still no enemies were visible. Then, forcing their machines up a very steep incline, which led over another range of hills, and finally, having to dismount and run beside them while the engine pulled the unloaded machine, they reached a boulder-strewn hill-top with broken, rocky ground on every side, and with a track leading beyond it by such a steep descent that experience of the capacity of their brakes told them at once that here some special arrangement must be made if they were to get down in safety. It was the track and its steepness that attracted their attention at first, and then masses of troops down in the country beyond which drew exclamations from them.

"Better tuck our bicycles well away out of sight and turn them with their heads in the direction from which we have just come," suggested Guy. "We may have to make a bolt for it at any moment, and the fact of having turned our machines and made all ready would act in our favour. Now to investigate matters and see what's happening!"

"Guns!" exclaimed Nicholas, who had seen far more of arms than had Guy, and may be said to have had a more experienced eye. "Guns, Guy, and plenty of men, I should say, by the look of the troops yonder. I imagine that we have come across a considerable concentration, and it will be just as well if we get out our maps and mark the spot down."

He and Guy, therefore, as they lay flat on the ground, spread out a map, and, having discovered their position upon it—or the position, we should say, which they imagined themselves to occupy—very carefully drew in the site upon which the troops they were then looking at were camped. They were able to delineate quite a considerable area, for down below there was, without doubt, a concentration of Turkish troops destined to hold the line somewhere south of the Black Sea coast and of Trebizond, which was the Grand Duke Nicholas's next objective in this historical invasion of Asiatic Turkey.

"A jolly difficult country to come across," Guy ventured, when the map was duly marked, and he was able once more to inspect the countryside closely through his glasses. "There are hills and deep valleys on every side, and I can see more than one *dere*—as the Turks call their rivers—winding towards the sea."

"With their western banks higher as a general rule than the eastern—at least, that is the report I

228 The Armoured-car Scouts

heard before we left our people," added Nicholas. "But it'll want a great deal to stop the Grand Duke's soldiers; men who came over the snow-clad Caucasian heights, practically in the midst of winter, and captured Erzerum—a city and fortress believed impregnable by the Turks—will not easily be stopped out here in the open. Now, what do we do, Guy? It seems to me that we have already made a discovery which would allow us to return, feeling that we had done our duty. Still, of course, if there is more to learn, and without doubt there is a great deal more, connected with the movements of the Turks, that we could with benefit investigate for our people, then, naturally enough, we shan't turn back."

It was just at that moment that a sharp report rang out somewhere to the north of them—that is to say, behind them, from the direction which they had been following—and before it reached their ears, and caused them to turn their heads, something else gave them quite a start and brought them to a kneeling position. It was the bullet discharged by the rifle which had set up that loud report, and which, fortunately missing them by a trifle, struck a boulder some few yards in front of the two, and smashed up into a thousand fragments, the majority of which hurtled forward over the top of the boulder, though some few splashed back, as it were, from the hard surface of the granite and peppered both Guy and Nicholas.

"Oh! Ah! So there's someone at that game, is there?" growled Jo, who at that very instant had been engaged in watching a distant and different part of the country from that under the observation of his two officers. "I caught a glimpse of the fellow, I believe, Mr. Guy, but he's out of sight now, and is lying doggo. What's the order, then? For I suppose, Mr. Nicholas, that Mr. Guy takes command just as formerly?"

"Spread out!" Guy told them. "Crawl in amongst the boulders and watch for a while. Wait a moment, though. Better still; Jo, you slink off there to the right and keep a watch on the spot where you imagined you saw the beggar. Nicholas, you crawl to the left and take a suitable position. I'll attract the fellow's attention here with my hat, and give him an object to shoot at."

They had, the instant after that shot rang out, dashed for their rifles, which they always carried slung on their machines. And now each one rapidly took up a position, while Guy, placing his cap on the barrel of his rifle, lifted it a few inches above the boulder behind which he was lying; then he let it drop again, only to send it bobbing up once more to the right of the boulder; whereat almost instantly there came the distant snap of a weapon, and the cap spun round, slipped from the muzzle of the rifle, and fell to the ground behind the boulder—in fact, it nearly

deposited itself on Guy's head, causing him to smile at the occurrence. Then he bobbed his head up, for hardly had his cap been struck by the bullet when he heard a distant scream, then a shout of satisfaction from Jo, and, later, a sharp call from Nicholas.

"Bagged him!" cried Jo truculently. "And I'll bag anyone else who comes in here to interfere with us. What right's a man to come shooting us in the back without giving us notice? It's a dirty game! But now, if you believe me——"

"More!" Nicholas called in warning tones. "More of them! I can see men streaming across the side of the hill yonder. In a little while they will have bagged us here, and will leave us no alternative but to fight them from this point, or to ride down below where those troops are concentrated."

Guy peered over the top of the boulder, and then, creeping rapidly across to another, stood up behind a growth of stunted bush, from which position he was able to look out upon the side of the hill they had recently ascended. Without a doubt, the position in which he and his friends found themselves was similar to that in which Guy had been, on that rather memorable occasion when the commander of the armoured-car detachment had sent him forward to scout in front of the party—only, of course, there was then the great difference that, behind him, our hero

left friends in those magnificent armoured cars, friends able and willing to support him. Here there were enemies behind, while in front, streaming across from the left, just as they had done on that other occasion, were a number of Turkish infantry—active fellows, armed with rifles, taking cover as they hurried forward to surround the party. Worse than that, amongst them, as Guy hurriedly surveyed them through his glasses, he recognized one man whom he had seen outside the fort, leading those ruffians who had come to massacre the unfortunate Armenians. He shut his glasses with a snap and promptly ran to his machine.

“There’s nothing for it, you fellows,” he sang out. “We’ve got to bolt for our lives! Sling your rifles and start your engines. Jo goes first, as he’s the slowest of the three of us. Nicholas, you’ll go next, and I’ll be at the rear. Go like the wind, and don’t stop to exchange shots with ’em; though, of course, if either of us is hit the others will do their best to pick him up and take him on, and for that Jo’s side-car will be just the thing. Now get going!”

And get going they did, under the shelter of the rocks where they had placed their machines. Getting astride his saddle, Jo let in his clutch with a bang, and he and his side-car shot off down the hill like a rocket; then came Nicholas, the tails of his tunic blowing out behind him, his body bent double, his nose almost on

the handle-bar, the barrel of his rifle lying flat over his back, and pointing out in sinister manner to the left, towards the enemy. And as they went, shots rang out, shouts came from the Turks, and, roused by sight of two of the men they were tracking racing off down the road, forty—perhaps fifty—hidden figures sprang up into the full light of day and blazed away at Jo and Nicholas.

Guy waited a few moments to see them well away and to cast a glance at the enemy, then he swung himself on to the saddle of his own machine, banged his clutch in just as Jo had done, and set off at such speed that the bicycle almost galloped away from him; but, gripping it with his knees, hanging on to his handles, his head low, his body doubled over, he and the machine became part and parcel of each other and roared down the slope as bullets screamed and rushed and whined and whinnied their way past them. And so, pursued by the shots of the enemy, their engines roaring, the exhausts beating a sharp tattoo, for all the world as if the three had opened fire with machine-guns, our friends raced away from that point of danger, and would, but for an accident, have had no cause to fear pursuit, for their rush, the speed at which they were going, quickly took them quite five miles from the men who had hoped to encircle them.

It was Jo who was the cause of their next trouble, Jo who literally and metaphorically upset the whole

party. For something happened to the jovial little sailor's machine: it may have been that the bar joining that useful side-car to the frame of his motor-bicycle parted; it may have been, on the other hand, that an unseen boulder shook some other portion of the concern adrift. Whatever happened, the result was startling, alarming, and utterly disconcerting for all three of the party. For of a sudden Jo's machine collapsed, stopped dead, and flung the sailor upwards and forward; and into the wreck of Jo's machine Nicholas plunged with a loud shout of warning, which, however, came too late to stop our hero. He wobbled badly, swerved to one side, and then, seeing that he would miss the wreck in front, and yet ride over the figure of the sailor, swerved again, side-slipped, and landed with a thud at the feet of the Russian. Then all three sat up and stared at one another, Jo rubbing his eyes, Nicholas fingering and feeling his arms, his wrists, his knees, and ankles, and Guy, breathing shortly and deeply, glaring at the sailor, endeavouring to give vent to his anger.

"Well of all the 'bust-ups'! Of all the 'sky-highs'! Of all—— Why, Mr. Guy, just take a look at your face! Oh, I never!"

From looking utterly serious and amazed at this tragedy, from wearing the appearance, indeed, of a man half-stunned and completely startled, Jo of a sudden burst into hearty roars of laughter and thrust

out one short, stumpy, impertinent finger at our hero. And Guy, breathing heavily, as we have said before, panting, indeed, for he had come down abruptly on the hard road, looking fierce and angry, as perhaps he had a right to do—for did not this upheaval practically ruin the chances of all three of them?—seeing the sailor open his mouth wide and hearing his roars of laughter, waxed even more indignant. For a moment he began to shake his fists and grind his teeth, and then, catching the infection from Jo—that irresistible fellow—becoming infected by his sense of merriment, as indeed had many a man before him, began to smile, his lips curved, and the appearance of resentment was swept from his features. Then he began to chuckle, began to laugh more easily, and finally he too was roaring, and pointing an equally dirty, if longer, finger at the sailor.

“Of all the dirty sweeps!” he shouted. “Talk about the pot and kettle! If I’m a sight, what about you? Look at him, Nicholas!”

And Nicholas transferred his attention at once from his bruised limbs, satisfied at last that none of them were broken, glanced first at the sailor and then at Guy, and then, to the amazement of both of them, also joined in the laughter.

“Pot and kettle—eh?” he shouted. “Well, if you could both of you see your own faces! Sweeps ain’t in it! You’re worse than the dirtiest of our mechanics.”

And dirty the two of them were, for that terrific "bust-up", as Jo had called it, had resulted in more than the wreckage of his bicycle; it had caused the gear-box of that machine to split asunder, to cast quantities of black oil and grease about—grease which now liberally anointed the countenances of Jo and our hero. They went on laughing till Nicholas, seizing a rag from his tool-box, had wiped their faces clean, and until, indeed, all three had regained their breath, and had had some little time in which to take in the whole scene and to understand its meaning. Then, serious for just a while, they laughed again, undaunted by this trouble.

"For what is it after all?" said Guy, "especially when compared with the mess we very nearly fell into up there on the summit of that hill! I'm sick of hills, for this is the second time that I've been cornered. But let's count up the damage."

"Good! I'll begin: One man very badly shaken," cried Jo, putting on his most lugubrious expression; whereat all three shrieked again, for their extraordinary escape from that hill, and finally from this "mix up" as Guy christened it, was sufficient to fill them with good spirits.

After all, things might have been very much worse, and now why should they be down-hearted? Jo certainly was not, and we may say with much truth that if the little sailor was in good trim—was "all ship-

236 The Armoured-car Scouts

shape", as he was fond of calling it—then he and his comrades for the moment would certainly be in tip-top spirits.

"Then we begins with me," said Jo; "all shook up, Mr. Guy, bones not broken, I believe, hull badly damaged."

"You stop," Guy told him, trying to be severe for a moment. "This is really a very serious business. Look at our machines! Now let's take stock of them: Jo's bicycle wrecked, ditto side-car. That's agreed, isn't it?"

Jo grinned, for the description hardly met the case, according to his opinion.

"Wrecked, is it, Mr. Guy?" he yelled. "That's being polite to what's left of it! Call it smashed to pieces—beyond repair—fit for the scrap-heap—and you've got it!"

"Then there's Nicholas's bicycle: handle-bars bent, front wheel also, but easily put in order—in half an hour it can be made useful. And then there's mine, which seems to have come out of the affair with only a few scratches."

When they had counted the whole thing up, and had tested the machines in every possible way, they found that the two motor-bicycles were in sufficiently good order, with small repairs of which they were quite capable, to carry them almost anywhere; but the other was a wreck and looked useless.

Their mad, furious dash had carried them right beyond the enemy, and had left the latter helplessly and hopelessly behind, and had caused them to give up the quest just for the moment; yet no doubt they were sending messages across country to warn other parties, and Guy and his friends had still to recollect that they were literally and absolutely in the heart of the enemy's country.

There was their mission, too, to be considered; and, conscious of it all the time, and anxious to bring it to a successful termination, they finally packed what they could of the contents of the side-car on their two machines, hiding the bits of the wrecked side-car and motor-bicycle by the roadside, and with them a large amount of ammunition. Then, with pockets bulging with tinned foods, each carrying his rifle over his shoulder, and with Jo perched on a precarious seat behind our hero, the three set off again, hardly knowing which way to turn, yet following the road, their intention now being to get back as soon as possible to their own people.

That night they turned from the road and sheltered in a ruined farm, where, having boiled some water and made tea and fried some slices of tinned beef, they ate their supper and lay down to sleep, little dreaming of the further adventures before them.

CHAPTER XIII

Captured by the Enemy

JUST after daybreak on the following morning the three who had ventured behind the Turkish lines, and who had had more than one brush with the enemy, roused themselves in the little billet which they had taken up overnight, and prepared for another day of adventure. Jo shook himself, rose to his feet, stretched his arms, and yawned; then, sailor-like—just as many another of his comrades would have done—the handy-man packed his pipe, struck a match and set the weed alight, and, puffing heavily, stepped to the door, and so into the open. A minute later he was pounced upon from behind by a huge Turk, and, though taken by surprise, butted the fellow off, wriggled out of his grasp, and then, turning, smote him heavily in truly nautical fashion. But hardly had his shout roused Guy and Nicholas thoroughly when half a dozen men threw themselves upon the sailor, while a dozen or more poured into the hut and overcame any resistance which Guy and Nicholas could offer.

Two minutes later the three of them, with hands

tied behind their backs, crestfallen, yet by no means down-hearted, were standing on the track outside, surrounded by their truculent and triumphant captors, who, many of them, anxious to improve the occasion, indicated by sundry jerks and signs that a rope waited each one of the three, and that presently they would be dangling between sky and earth, their feet dancing on space and their necks constricted by a noose of Turkish manufacture.

"All very pleasant, of course!" Guy said at last, when he had in some measure recovered from the astonishment and disappointment which this new phase of their journey had brought them. "'Threatened men live long', they say; so perhaps there is some hope for us after all—eh, Nicholas? But a word of warning—don't let these fellows know that either you or I can understand their lingo. That will lead them to speak freely, and may allow us to pick up information of value. Ah! I see an officer riding towards us! That's better; for Turkish officers have a fairly good reputation, and, though I would not like to trust myself too long to these fellows of the rank and file, an officer will guarantee our security."

"Declare yourselves!" demanded the officer, a young, pleasant-featured Turk, dismounting when he reached the party and stepping close up to the three prisoners. "You've been captured in our lines, and no doubt have been spying out our movements,

though I notice for your benefit that one of you is dressed in Russian uniform, and the others in what I should take to be the uniform of the British Navy."

Guy looked blankly at him. Jo set his feet wide apart, his arms akimbo, nodded at the Turk as though he understood every word, and then smiled indulgently upon him. Browbeat Jo? You could never do it! And the smile—that smile which wouldn't come off—was just as refreshing, just as natural, and just as infectious as it had ever been. The Turk nodded back at him, severely at first, then with a smile.

"Good! I see you don't understand, my man; but you're a decent sort of fellow. Wait! I'll try you all with English." And thereupon he addressed the three in purest English, causing them much astonishment and gratification.

"Allow me to congratulate you, sir," said Guy, acting as spokesman of the party; "you speak just like an English gentleman."

"And perhaps should deserve your censure were I not to do so," came the answer; "for I happen to have lived in England, to have been resident in one of your universities, and to have had the benefit of an English scholastic training. But, of course, we are enemies now."

"Of course!" admitted Guy.

"Naturally!" said Nicholas. "Permit me to say



© 2000

"JO SMOTE HIM HEAVILY IN TRULY NAUTICAL FASHION."

that your English is far better than mine, sir, and I have had many opportunities of learning from my friend here, Guy Grammond."

"Hear, hear!" burst in Jo—the irrepressible Jo—not to be kept in prolonged silence. "Pity we are enemies, sir; you look like a downright British officer."

The Turk cleared his throat. By his smiles, his friendly manner, and his gestures, he was obviously pleased and rather flattered at the congratulations showered upon him, and it was quite evident meant to treat his prisoners fairly.

"Of course," he said at last, when they had chatted for a few moments, "you have been taken red-handed behind our lines, and though you are, naturally enough, not ordinary spies who have come amongst us in disguise, yet I fear your presence here will be looked upon as a very serious matter. However, for the time being, while you are in my hands, you shall receive good treatment. "Cut their bonds!" he called to his men. "These prisoners will give me their *parole*, and will march back surrounded by a guard, but otherwise unmolested. My friends," he said, turning to the prisoners, "I take it that you will give me your *parole*? Is that agreed?"

"Agreed!" declared Guy, while Jo and Nicholas promptly nodded.

"Then we can march back to the camp at once,"

said the officer. "A nice little outing you have given me, I can tell you! The report was brought in last night that three men, mounted on motor-bicycles of some description, had been traced to the ridge overlooking one of our camps, and a considerable party was sent out to try to capture you. They failed; and perhaps it is fortunate for you that that was the case, for they were not inclined to be too gentle. Your escape from them maddened them, in fact, and if they could have caught up with you, or if, indeed, they had formed part of this company, the consequences might have been serious. Then a signal was flashed in that marks had been discovered on the road by one of our pickets which proved that one of your machines had come to grief; portions of a wrecked bicycle were discovered, and I, arriving at the spot with this company, was ordered to seek all round for you. It was only as the dawn broke that a peasant whom we passed gave us information. Now we will depart."

"One moment, sir," sang out Jo. "Maybe you have had breakfast?"

That caused the officer to smile.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "my men have brought rations with them, while I have come without any food. What then? It's a five-mile walk back to the camp, perhaps more, and it will be midday before we reach it."

"Then a cup of tea, some hot slices of 'bully-beef',

and what not won't come amiss—eh, sir?" said Jo insinuatingly, and then smiled outright.

"You can all sit down here and eat your rations," commanded the officer, turning to his men. "I shall sit with the prisoners, and converse with them, for I thereby shall learn matters of importance perhaps; and, in any case, they have given me their *parole*, and I can trust them. Now, my friends," he said, as they walked towards the hut and out of ear-shot of his men, "we can form a happy little party. Tell me your tale—just as much of it as you think fit—and, believe me, nothing that I hear will go against you."

Very soon the kettle was over the fire which Jo had built, the water in it was sizzling and boiling, and that wonderful pan, which Jo had contrived to tie to Guy's bicycle, was over the flames, and in it slices of bully-beef were frying. They made a merry party of it, those three prisoners and their captor, determined to forget the future and to be happy for the moment. And as they ate they gossiped—first Guy telling something of their movements, then Nicholas chiming in, and, later, Jo adding some piquant fact which, as a general rule, set the party laughing. But not a word did they venture upon their meeting with the Turkish horse, and of their defence of the fort with those humble Armenians.

"It might go against us," Guy had warned his friends, taking advantage of the temporary absence of

244 The Armoured-car Scouts

the officer, who had gone to speak to his men just before they commenced their meal. "Better not mention it. Our friend here is, I am sure, a decent fellow, but he in his turn may be cross-examined when we get to the camp, and might be compelled to hand on the information we give him."

Thus it followed that there was no evidence to connect the three with that event, and, arriving at length in the camp which they had watched from the top of the ridge, and finding themselves now amongst thousands of Turkish soldiers, they came as prisoners discovered behind the Turkish lines, as soldiers, not as spies, with that, and only that, offence recorded against them.

"Of course, you will be tried, and probably before that closely cross-questioned," the officer told them. "Seeing that I speak English, it may be that I shall be employed for the purpose, but you may rely upon it that I will do my best for you. Now, I must go, but I will warn your guards to treat you fairly."

And, true to his word, they heard him addressing the sergeant of the guard sternly in the hearing of his men, and, from the demeanour of these latter as the hours went by, felt confident of good treatment.

"But, of course, it isn't the thing we want," said Guy at length, awaking from a deep reverie, and breaking a painfully long silence during which each one of the three had been wrapped up in his own

thoughts. "Our job was to investigate matters in the Turkish lines, and then to get back as soon as possible. Well, we have investigated matters, but that ain't the smallest use unless we can return to carry on our information to the Grand Duke—eh, isn't it that, Nicholas?"

"Quite!" agreed the Russian. "We've got to get away, that's all! And the sooner the better! Of course, our *parole* is ended, Guy?"

"Distinctly!" answered our hero. "I told the officer that quite plainly, and in your presence."

"Which means that we might go this blessed minute and leave no stain on our honour, Mr. Guy. Well, now, we three had best put our heads together. The fellows watching us are friendly enough just now, and it seems to me that we ought to take advantage of it, for to-morrow the guard will be relieved, and the next day after there will be another lot, and so on, all strangers, and few of them, if any, knowing of the orders which that officer gave these fellows. So 'to-night's the night!' Mr. Guy. Time's settled and fixed, you might say; but the method's the thing we've got to consider. How's it to be done? I'm beat! I've been sittin' 'ere on this blessed floor this last hour or more, chewin' the question over, and it's still as far from settled as ever."

"Ditto!" remarked Guy, rather desperately, for, cudgel his brains as he might, he could arrive at no

solution. The question did, indeed, beat him, defeated him entirely, and, like Jo, he had not even the remotest suggestion to offer. "Beaten to a frizzle," he admitted sullenly. "Let's go over the ground again. To tell you fellows the truth, I'm a rather queer sort of beggar. When I get into a tight position I like to pull out a sheet of paper, put it down on the table, and then with a pencil work out a scheme."

That caused Nicholas to throw his head back and burst into hearty laughter, which an instant later brought the sentry outside to the door of the tent in which they had been placed, and a very ugly countenance was thrust in upon them. The man glared at the prisoners.

"Who is laughing? Who throws contempt upon the Turk?" he demanded furiously, and a moment later clanged the butt of his rifle on the boards which formed the floor, and, pushing the muzzle forward, showed a gleaming bayonet fixed to it. Then he handled his weapon, throwing it into a horizontal position, and presented the point of the bayonet at Guy's chest. It looked, in fact, as though he might transfix our hero, and Jo, seeing his intention, made ready to spring upon the fellow. But never, perhaps, were prisoners better befriended than Guy and his friends had been since they were taken, for there was a step outside, someone coughed, and then of a sudden the Turkish sentry was shot to one side, while

another figure appeared. It was the officer who had been the cause of their capture, that pleasant Turk who spoke such excellent English, who had, indeed, an academic education obtained in one of the English universities. He had violently kicked this angry sentry right into the middle of the tent, and sent him sprawling and his weapon clattering on the boards.

"I apologize, my friends," he said at once, in the smooth, rather musical tones which he affected. "This scoundrel has dared to use violence, in spite of my orders! Sergeant of the guard," he called loudly, "take this fellow away, relieve him at once, place him in the guard-room, and report him to your captain to-morrow. I discovered the fellow threatening these prisoners. But, wait! For what reason did you point your bayonet at this man?" he demanded sternly of the crestfallen Turk, who had now picked himself up and was standing at attention.

Then the officer listened attentively while the man gave a lame explanation.

"Take him away," he ordered. "He can make his excuses to-morrow when he is brought up for the crime. Now you've posted another man, warn him strictly that there shall be no interference with these prisoners. My friends, it is a crime to laugh here in this camp just now, for I and my comrades are sore at our want of success against the Russians; therefore be careful!"

He was gone in a moment, leaving the prisoners almost dumbfounded. For the incident had taken but a few minutes, and at its termination Guy found himself still staring at Nicholas, while the latter sat back, leaning upon his hands, which were placed on the floor behind him, his head thrown back—in the very position he had occupied when that hearty laugh burst from him.

“You can go on! What was it all about?” Guy asked him acidly. “Now then, Nicholas, let’s hear your explanation. That laugh of yours very nearly cost one of us his life—a rather big price to pay for any fellow’s cackle.”

It was like the polite and pleasant Nicholas first of all to give vent to his sorrow, and just like him to smile at Guy, and, casting his thoughts back again to the incident, or rather to the words which caused his merriment, once more almost to burst into a fit of laughter.

“I was thinking of that pencil and paper of yours, and of the extraordinary habit you tell us you have of working difficulties out on paper. That beats me almost as much, or as thoroughly, as does the question of our escape from these Turks. Work things out on paper, indeed! Jo, my friend, did Mr. Guy work the plot out very carefully when we came upon those Armenians, when he decided to make use of that fort, when he captained the whole business, took us all

under his wing, drove us from pillar to post, bullied us, browbeat us, and made us do his bidding? Did you see him put the whole thing down on a bit of paper?"

Jo chuckled and glanced sideways at Guy: the sailor was enjoying the joke immensely. For never before had anyone, even in the sailor's experience—and he had a wide experience of officers—come to a decision with more briskness or more rapidly. He began to giggle loudly, and nodded his head vigorously in Nicholas's direction.

"You've got him there, sir," he said. "Mr. Guy has been pitching us a yarn, and not you nor I can believe it. But I've heard other generals say as 'ow a pencil and a bit of paper helps 'em in working out a problem. Well, here's a problem! Here we are shut up in this tent, with sentries on guard outside, and precious few of those beggars inclined to treat us too gently. We've one friend, and perhaps to-morrow he'll have gone, perhaps he won't. But supposing he has, and we are still here, what then?"

Yes, it was a question of what their fortune might be in the future; and the three once more set their heads to work, and even produced a scrap of paper and a pencil in order to help them to draw up a scheme—some feasible plan which would give them their liberty. Then a man entered with a tray of food and some steaming coffee, and the three lapsed into

silence as they ate their meal, and afterwards puffed at the cigarettes which had most thoughtfully been provided by their captors, or, more precisely, by that officer who had proved such a friend. Then, some while after darkness had fallen, and after they had peeped from under the flies of the tent through the doorway and had ascertained that a sentry patrolled up and down both in front and behind their prison, they lay down in the blankets which had been issued to them, and, feeling that there was no opportunity yet of escape, and that therefore by sleeping they lost no chance of regaining their liberty, they soon sank into a dreamless sleep—the sort of sleep which comes to men who have worked hard, have fought hard, perhaps, and have expended much energy.

Early on the following morning, having received another meal and been permitted to wash themselves at an adjacent water-trough provided for horses, the prisoners were paraded outside their tent and were marched through the camp, through the ranks of hundreds of Turkish troops, and so to a central tent, above which a flag flew denoting that it was the head-quarters of a divisional general. But not once did they catch sight of their friend, so reluctantly concluded that he must have been called away.

“We’ve got to rely upon ourselves then,” Guy said as they marched along. “Don’t forget, you fellows, not a word about the fort. And let us hope that none

of the men who attacked us there saw us, and will recognize us; that is, if any of them have returned to this camp and have given information of the affair. Steady! They are just going to march us in."

A loud command rang out a moment later, and the prisoners were marched into the tent with an escort about them, and presently found themselves at one end, facing a table covered with a red cloth, littered with books and maps, behind which, on a camp-stool, sat a Turkish officer of somewhat unprepossessing appearance. In the background were other officers, while at his side there stood a tall individual in Turkish uniform and wearing a fez, yet apparently not a Turk—of some other nationality—one whose features were strangely familiar to our hero. Guy peered at the fellow, stared hard at the general, and returned his fierce glances without flinching, then let his eyes roam round the interior of the tent, noting the other officers present, the escort now ranged up behind himself and his friends, and those books and papers on the table. Finally his glances went back to that tall, somewhat sinister-looking officer—that stranger officer—standing by the table at the elbow of the Turkish general.

"Seen him before! Know the 'cut of his jib' as Jo calls it! Who can he be?" wondered Guy.

"Prisoners captured within a few miles of this camp, sir!" suddenly exclaimed that sinister officer

beside the table, using the Turkish tongue rather haltingly, with a strangely guttural accent, and in tones as familiar to Guy as were his features.

Yet though Guy was sure that he knew the man, he had yet not been able to decide when or where he had known him, nor who precisely was before him.

The general cleared his throat, looked up at the prisoners through his glasses, took them off, wiped them, replaced them, and glanced up at the officer at his elbow—glanced in fact in that manner which a man adopts when he is uncertain what to do or what to say, and looks for guidance from someone. It was obvious, in fact, that this Turkish general looked for guidance from the tall stranger officer at his elbow, and was now indeed glancing at him almost appealingly.

“A—hem!” he said, clearing his throat again; “prisoners captured near the camp. Ah!”

“Russian!” came from the tall officer, “at least so I have heard it reported, though there was some word of an Englishman amongst them. I will examine the fellows.”

Though this officer had cast a swift glance at the prisoners and their escort as they marched into the presence of the general, he had not until then taken much notice of them, had not, in fact, closely inspected their features. Now, however, he turned upon them, and ran his eyes critically and coldly over Nicholas

first of all, then over Jo, and then over our hero. A second later he started violently, while Guy, recognizing now for the first time who really stood before him, flushed red, partly with astonishment, partly in anger. Let us take the reader into our confidence at once. When Guy returned to that city in Russia, now months ago, to discover the premises occupied by his father burned to the ground, and merely a shell remaining, when, in fact, he discovered himself to be an orphan, friendless and fatherless and penniless, robbed by his father's partner, he had scarcely hoped to meet his father's murderer again, and indeed had allowed all thoughts of this distressing event to be swallowed up by the war then raging, and by his own desire to take an active part in it. And here, without seeking on his part, without any effort to trace this rascal, here was Ernst Blott himself, more spruce and polished than of yore, looking infinitely smarter in Turkish uniform, yet Ernst Blott without a doubt—the man who had robbed Guy of his father and of his fortune. We may go a stage further and explain that what at first sight may seem somewhat extraordinary was indeed no unusual event when Germans are concerned. For Ernst Blott was indeed only one more of the thousands upon thousands of trained Germans, planted in foreign countries, sent with Government funds to Russia or elsewhere to, as it were, colonize some spot until then innocent of Germans. to lay a foundation

for the coming of others, to commence a business profitable to themselves, which would give them active interest, and which at the same time would provide opportunities for learning the habits of the people amongst whom they lived, and of acquiring knowledge of military matters. In the first place, then, let us understand that this Ernst Blott, like many another emigrant from the German Fatherland, was a trained soldier; in the second place, also like numbers of that huge army of emigrants aided by Government funds, the man was sufficiently unscrupulous; and, thirdly, having accomplished his object, having passed information back to Berlin, having benefited himself as much as possible from residence in Russia, he was, shortly after the first rifle cracked in this gigantic war, back at his old trade—a soldier once more, planted this time in the Turkish army, where his training and his knowledge of troops would assist in building up forces which would fight in the long run for Germany.

Ernst Blott stared at Guy—stared hard, and rubbed his eyes, while his lips parted. A moment before, standing there spruce and dapper and upright, with squared shoulders, he had looked round the tent in a manner at once arrogant and disdainful; but now, as his eyes fell upon our hero, the memory of his guilt flashed back to the man's mind, the blood left his face, and for a while he looked pallid and frightened,

looked hither and thither, indeed, as though seeking for a means of escape, as if he were desperate. And then his jaws closed with a snap; his figure straightened, and he cast a threatening glance at Guy, which changed a moment later to one of triumph.

"So!" he murmured, as he dropped a hand to the hilt of his sword and pondered for a moment. "That boy is here! The son of his father! And I see by the way in which he eyed me that he knows what happened, that he realizes that I am his debtor. Bah! Then he shall have little time in which to realize and calculate the matter. General!" he cried aloud, clearing his throat with effort, "these are the prisoners. As I told you, they were reported to me to be Russian; but now that I have looked at them, I see that two are British; more than that, Excellency, one of them is known to me as a dangerous fellow."

"A dangerous fellow!" the Turkish general exclaimed, looking up at the German. "But— How?"

"A spy—that is all!" Ernst Blott answered. "A spy, Excellency. No wonder that the Turks have been beaten by the Russians, for fellows like these have wormed out the secrets of our movements, have carried information of our intentions, and have wrecked our plans of defence and offence almost before we ourselves had made them. He is a spy—deal with him as spies deserve! See, that is the one, the fellow to the left—the man who glares at me so angrily!"

CHAPTER XIV

A Fateful Meeting

OUR hero was not a resentful young fellow, not given to taking oaths nor to lending himself to thoughts of vengeance. Guy had almost banished the memory of Ernst Blott; only, in his quiet, modest sort of way, he had more than once determined that one of these days, when the war was over—for, indeed, until that was done with, his thoughts must be engaged in helping to beat the enemy—he would, if he could trace the German, bring him to justice for his awful crime, and, if it were possible then—though it was very unlikely—extract from him the wealth he had stolen. Let us add, too, that that sum of money was by no means a contemptible one, and with it jingling in his pocket, or, better, placed in a bank, Guy would certainly have been to some degree independent. And now, see what a situation had arisen! He, Guy, a helpless prisoner, stood before the Turkish general, and listened as Ernst Blott, secure himself, denounced him as a spy!

“I call your attention to the man there,” the German cried, as he pointed a finger at our hero, and, bend-

ing his tall frame, rapped imperatively on the table. "Your Excellency, see him, the one to the left. I know the man! He is not Russian, but British, one of our worst enemies! An informer—a spy—once in the service of Russia, and no doubt still worming out secrets for her! See him—a dangerous spy—who no doubt has already obtained information of our movements of huge importance."

The German drew himself to his full height, clicked his heels, and then stared round the tent, giving each one of the Turkish officers the benefit of an arrogant stare, as much as to defy them to deny the truth of what he was saying. On Guy he turned a glance now triumphant, yet in a measure frightened; for his eyes hardly dared to return our hero's frank gaze, were shifty, and presently turned once more upon the general. Again his bony knuckles rapped imperatively upon the table.

"You've heard, Excellency? You've listened to what I have to say?" he demanded. "Then try him! Give him a summary trial and condemn him, before he can send that information to the enemy."

The old Turkish general, grey-headed, and with bristling moustaches, once more took off his glasses and rubbed them with a silk handkerchief he drew from a pocket. He sneezed violently, blew his nose with much ostentation, flourishing the handkerchief, glancing over the top of it sideways at the German

258 The Armoured-car Scouts

as if he were frightened of him, and then at the three prisoners, looking at them inquisitively; and all the while, without a shadow of doubt, delaying matters, giving himself time in which to make up his mind before dealing with the question.

After all, this officer was no martinet, and was, indeed, in civil times a pleasant-spoken, dilettante Turkish gentleman. The war had caught him up, had forced him to leave a country estate where, when he did anything at all—for, after the Turkish fashion, he was very slothful—he engaged in purely rural pursuits. But this Armageddon had brought him from his home back to the army, had thrust responsibilities on his shoulders which weighed terribly heavy after that easy, slothful life in which he had indulged for years now, and which had made him almost incompetent when it came to leading soldiers, and certainly vacillating and indecisive when it came to matters of moment. And here was a matter of considerable moment! For this pleasant old gentleman, fierce though he looked in that fez and with his moustaches bristling from his cheeks, was, as we have said, at heart a gentle old fellow. He coughed and sneezed again, wiped his glasses for the twentieth time, and, seeing that Ernst Blott was becoming impatient, and knowing his power—for he could dictate to this general—he lifted his hand deprecatingly, then adjusted his glasses slowly, peering most of

the time at the prisoners, and casting now and again a sharp suspicious glance at the German.

"A spy? You know him? You've met him before? Where? When? Surely you are mistaken?"

"Mistaken!" thundered Ernst Blott, his manner bullying, bending over the table once more and rapping it peremptorily. "I mistaken? A German officer mistaken? What next? You will accuse me soon of bringing false evidence before this court."

At that he stood erect again, clicked his heels, and once more treated the officers present, and standing behind the general, to that arrogant stare of his, to that defiant, bullying stare which they loathed so greatly—which, indeed, had made the Turks hate the majority of German officers with whom they came in contact.

Looking about him quietly, now that he had recovered from his astonishment and, we must add, from the dismay which the presence of Ernst Blott had caused him, Guy, undisturbed by the storm raging about the head of the Turkish general, inspected the officers at the far end of the tent, noted every feature of the general, peered hard at Ernst Blott, and finally exchanged glances with his comrades. He wasn't frightened, was hardly more than distressed, and, beyond all, was interested, was curious, in fact, to learn what next would happen, how the trial would go, and whether Ernst Blott would succeed in browbeating the general; or whether that

easy-going old officer, that fierce-looking old fellow, whose twinkling eyes, undisguised by glasses, disclosed a kind heart and belied his general appearance, would defy him, would give the prisoners a fair hearing, and, in fact, protect them. It was "touch-and-go", one stroke of the pen as it were, and the Turk could have sent Guy forthwith to a firing-party. Yet the old man hesitated, peered still longer at him, and, noting his youthful looks, his open, frank face, and the courage with which he was facing a situation of great danger, he half smiled, lifted his hand again to arrest a flow of words from the German, and would have spoken had not the latter then rapped again on the table, and, seeing the way matters were going, fearing that Guy would escape him, played a trump card.

"Excellency," he said, bending over the general, and hissing rather than speaking the words in his ear, "I came here from army head-quarters but two days ago to inspect your division. I came with a report of slack discipline amongst your troops, of want of vigour, and had instructions to return and render an opinion of all that I saw—upon officers as well as others."

The old general looked up at him swiftly, and, realizing his meaning, almost trembled. For, though he might not fear this German—this sinister Ernst Blott, who like many other German officers attached to Turkish troops was all-powerful—he yet feared the result of that report of his given to his corps com-

mander. Easygoing though the Turks may be, they are apt to deal severely enough with one another, and this friendly general knew well enough that to lose the confidence of his senior would result, not only in the loss of his appointment, but most likely of his life also. His lips twitched, and, seeing that, Ernst Blott pressed his advantage.

“But, Excellency,” he said, and his manner was truculent, persuasive, threatening, and subtle, “but, General, there is no need for my report on you and your officers and men to be other than most favourable; only, naturally enough, if one sees for one’s self a court properly constituted, such as this is, refusing to listen to evidence produced by a responsible officer, then what would you? Is that a correct state of affairs? Would the general commanding the corps to which you belong approve of such weakness? And if not, what action would he take? Listen, Excellency!” he added, bending lower and whispering in the general’s ear, “I have no evil feeling for you, but you know what I know—generals badly reported on disappear; it is a curious happening in the Turkish army.”

“Stop!”

The old general sat up and cleared his throat noisily. Gentle-minded though he was, he yet cared more for his own safety and comfort than for that of a stranger. “And besides,” he argued, as he peered across at the

prisoners again, "what were the strangers to him? What business had they to come into Turkey? And, above all, what were they doing in those parts? Naturally enough, spying!"

"Repeat the evidence!" he exclaimed, blowing his nose loudly. "One, you say, is a spy! You knew him before! Where, Major?"

At that the German stood erect again, and unblushingly declared that he had known Guy as an informer in Russia, had been deputed by the German Government to keep watch on him, had known his father as a spy also, and now denounced him as a dangerous enemy to Turkey.

"Do not waste your breath on the matter, Excellency," he said. "No stronger evidence could be put before you, for, see, here are three enemies of yours and my country, captured in the midst of us; they admit that they are enemies, and are dressed as such, so that there can be no doubt on the matter. But why are they here? Naturally, sent by their commanding officer to learn all about us. Good! That is a common ruse in warfare. Men so discovered, if not in disguise, are treated as prisoners of war, though hardly with honour. But, Excellency, if one of these men is known as a spy—was, indeed, an informer before the war started—what then? Once a spy, always a spy! Is it not so?"

"It is!" the general gasped. "Certainly," he re-

peated, gathering a little courage. "Once a spy, always a spy! It is a dirty game, a dishonourable profession. But, surely the one you point out is young; before the war started he was a mere boy or a youth. Surely he could not have been an informer?"

Ernst Blott smiled at that, for he felt already that he had almost gained his point, and now a little persuasion would find him successful. He had won the general over by that subtle threat of his, and now all that he had to do was to make the path easy for him.

"A boy? Yes! Hardly more than that! Though he is older than he looks! But even a boy can be an informer; their very youth helps them. Take the word of a German officer for it, Excellency. What need have I to denounce this fellow other than because of my love of country? Are not the Turks allies of Germany? And is not every German officer desirous to see Turkey triumphant? There, then, is my reason for denouncing this spy. Surely that is enough, Excellency!"

Yes, it was quite enough; though in his heart of hearts, deep down, as it were, the old general still hesitated, still felt pity for that prisoner who had been picked out from the others, and would indeed, had no persuasion been applied—that gentle persuasion in which Ernst Blott had indulged—most certainly have listened to and possibly befriended our hero. But as it was, fear for his own safety, fear of Ernst Blott,

caused him to sit up on his camp-stool, to rap the table almost as peremptorily as the German had done, to call the attention of the officers behind him, and then to ask them whether they had heard the evidence.

"And you?" he demanded, turning to Guy. "Ah! I forgot; you don't speak our language!"

At that Ernst Blott chuckled, clicked his heels again, and saluted elaborately.

"That is one of the points which go against him, Excellency? He professes not to speak your tongue, not to understand it. Ask the guard, and they will tell you that not once has he opened his lips to them. Call in that officer who captured these fellows yesterday—let him add his evidence.

It was a sorry state of affairs for these three prisoners, and in particular for Guy; and, as he waited there with the Turkish guard standing behind him while a messenger was sent post haste for that pleasant Turkish officer who had befriended him on the previous day, he blamed himself that he had been so cautious—so cunning, if you will—and had warned his friends to pretend entire ignorance of Turkish. True, in Jo's case such pretension was entirely honest and accurate, but Nicholas knew a smattering of the Turkish tongue, while Guy could chatter quite easily. A moment later the officer in question entered, and at once Ernst Blott turned an arrogant pair of eyes upon him.

"Listen while His Excellency asks a question! Stand there!" he commanded peremptorily, whereat Guy saw the officer give a violent start, flush under his dusky skin, and bite his lips with vexation and anger.

Indeed, not he alone, but many a Turkish officer found his blood boiling, found his anger raised to the highest pitch by the effrontery and arrogance of the German officers sent amongst them. Swinging his eyes round till they encountered the three prisoners, he started again, and then faced the general.

"I take my orders from my senior," he said sharply, darting a glance at the German. "Excellency, I am here! You sent for me!"

"Then say, of the three men yonder whom you captured, can one of them speak our tongue? Did one of them understand, or appear to understand, a word of Turkish spoken to him? Or did they profess, all three of them, to be entirely ignorant of the language?"

Out of the mouth of that Turk who had proved so friendly to them, the prisoners were condemned, or rather our hero was condemned. For, swinging round, turning a pleasant smile upon the prisoners, and then facing the general, the officer answered very promptly.

"None of them can speak our tongue. Not that they told me so directly; for, seeing that I speak Eng-

lish perfectly, there was no need for them to converse in any other language. But I gathered that they did not speak Turkish."

Ernst Blott turned a triumphant stare upon the court of officers behind the general, and upon His Excellency himself, and then a sickening smile upon the officer who had just spoken.

"Hark to him!" he called loudly; "he tells us what he believes to have been the truth, but I, I know better! That young man there, that spy, knows your language! See! Watch his face! He has understood every word of our conversation!"

To those who cared to watch the prisoners, there could indeed be little doubt that something had upset the one particularly concerned in this trial. All eyes were now turned on Guy, while many a glance had been thrown in his direction during the last three minutes. Try as he might, he could not suppress the tell-tale flush which rose to his cheeks every now and again, the sharp glances which he threw at the German, the expressions flitting across his features; of dismay as the German spoke; then of hope as the general trumpeted loudly, hesitated, and delayed, and showed an unmistakable desire to be merciful; then of despair as Ernst Blott goaded him, threatened him in that subtle manner; and finally of hopelessness as the other officer was summoned and gave his evidence. It was written plainly on his face, indeed,

that, as the German declared so emphatically, he understood every word that had passed, appreciated to the full the hopelessness of his position, and realized all that was passing. Even that dull, fierce-looking but soft-hearted old general was convinced, and commenced at once to cough and splutter somewhat violently. Then, again blowing his nose, and, with a final flourish of his handkerchief, he fixed his penetrating gaze on Guy, and attracted the German's attention.

"Do I understand, then," he asked, "that this one alone is a spy?"

"Who knows?"

Ernst Blott merely shrugged his shoulders. "What does it matter about the others?" he asked himself, *sotto voce*. "If they hang the three or shoot them, the lives of the other two are nothing to me, though it makes two enemies less for Germany. But this one young fellow is all I care about."

His Excellency coughed impatiently. "A spy! And captured near this camp!" he exclaimed as if trying to give himself courage. "What then?" he demanded of the German; "I asked about the others!"

"Give them the benefit of the doubt, Excellency. Send them to a prisoners' camp and have them watched. But this one, well, a spy!—did not we say a little time ago that once a spy always a spy?—always dangerous to the Turk? Excellency," he con-

tinued, bending, and again whispering in the general's ear, "let them see at your head-quarters that you are a man of energy and decision, let them have a report that, thanks to your activity, a spy was discovered—a dangerous spy—and promptly executed. That will gain for you the approval of your superior officer, and may calm any doubts he has of your efficiency."

The final stage of Guy's trial was short, sharp, and decisive. The general glowered upon him, waved the three prisoners peremptorily aside, and commanded them to be marched out of the tent.

"Two of them—those two," he cried, pointing to Nicholas and Jo, "will be sent down country as soon as possible, whenever a party of prisoners is going. This other one will be shot—he is a spy, and deserves what he will get—he will be shot to-morrow at sunrise."

"Why not to-day?" demanded Ernst Blott.

"Wait!" cried that friendly officer, who had been summoned to the trial. "What is this I hear? You propose to shoot this young fellow without listening to a word he may have to say for himself! A spy, you say—you, Major Ernst Blott, of the German army? Prove it! Excellency, do not condemn this young fellow without ample proof. Ask him whether he is actually a spy! Seek for some reason why this German officer should denounce him! There is something crooked here!—this is not justice!"

"Not justice!"

If the old general could be browbeaten by the German, as was undoubtedly the case, and if he were afraid of him, or rather of the report he was about to make, he was at least not afraid of any of his own officers. With regard to them he knew his own power perfectly, was aware that he could do almost as he liked with them, and the very suspicion that one of them was desirous of contesting his will, of reproaching him for his actions, was anxious even to give him advice, sent him into a fury. His face flared, his moustaches bristled more than ever, and once more he brought his fist with a thump upon the camp-table, causing the maps upon it to dance and flutter, and the pens to roll from it.

"Not justice!" he shouted again. **"Leave the court before I place you under arrest! March the prisoners out! Shoot this one at sunrise to-morrow morning!"**

The sergeant of the guard gave a sharp order. Prisoners and escort turned to their right, and, feeling in a terrible whirl, hardly knowing where he was or what had happened, Guy was marched out behind his friends, conscious of the fact, as he left the tent, that Ernst Blott's eyes—those cruel, arrogant eyes—were following him with a glance of triumph.

For indeed the German had been wonderfully successful. We should add that Ernst Blott was

perhaps not so very much worse than many others of his countrymen: a hard worker, always ambitious, like every German, he was also unscrupulous, as is sometimes the case with men of ambition. Determined to grow rich, to become powerful, he was not prepared to allow much time to elapse before arriving at the summit of his wishes, and thus, pressed by necessity, as it were, he had throughout his life pushed people aside when they stood in his way, and gained his object in this manner or that, whether honest or the reverse he cared not. Thus in Russia he had quickly become the paramount of the two partners—himself and Guy's father; and also, in the same way, knowing that war was coming—for Germany took pains to send the news beforehand to her colonists in other countries—he made his preparations, made the most of his opportunities, decided that nothing must prevent him from attaining his object; and money being that particular object at the moment, and his partner standing between himself and a large sum, he waited his opportunity, laid his horrible scheme, and finally slew his partner. The slaying of his partner's son, who might one of these days prove an awkward individual, might even attempt to punish him for that earlier act, was but a simple addition to the crime he had already perpetrated. Ernst Blott did not hesitate a moment, he merely chuckled, glowered upon the young fellow

whom he had sent to his end, and stared triumphantly as he watched his departing figure.

As for Guy, he marched, head in air, out of the tent, proud, defiant, yet with that proudly held head of his buzzing, bewildered; hardly knowing where he was going, merely following like an automaton the guards in front of him. Yet, though his brain swam, the words "condemned to be shot in the morning" kept passing across his mind, were photographed upon his cerebral matter, stood in huge, fiery lines out in front of him as he walked—"condemned to be shot in the morning"—condemned to die!—Guy Grammond to be shot as a spy! To be shot at dawn!

It was horrible! Worse even for Nicholas, who understood it all now, and Jo, to whom the Russian had whispered the dreadful tidings—worse, far worse for them. For their heads were in no whirl at all; only the awful news, the awful knowledge that their comrade was to be shot, to be foully slain, filled all their thoughts, and occupied every atom of their attention. What would those gallant tars have said who so lately had been comrades of those three, the handy-men with the armoured-car detachment? Let us turn aside for a moment and see what they were doing at this particular period, and how hopelessly far away they were from that spot where Guy Grammond lay condemned as a spy, under orders to be shot in the early morning.

CHAPTER XV

The Naval Armoured-car Detachment

THE Caucasian area is no billiard-table, no smooth plain offering beautiful macadamized roads or dustless thoroughfares over which cars may spin as they do in this country. It is a land of craggy heights, of sandstone ridges, of gullies, crevices, nullahs, valleys, and deep ditches, of tracks hardly worthy the name of roads, of zigzagging paths a foot deep in slush in the rainy weather, and equally deep in stifling dust when the sun has risen high enough and the early summer has arrived.

No easy matter, therefore, was it for that naval armoured-car detachment to make headway, to carry out its orders, to make the dashing reconnaissances expected of it.

“It ain’t all beer and skittles; no, lummy!” one able seaman exclaimed, as he spat into the hollow of one huge palm and lubricated the other with it. “No bloomin’ walk-over, believe me! This ’ere ridge is enough to stop a Dreadnought, let alone an armoured-car detachment!”

Naval Armoured-car Detachment 273

"Smartly there, lads—smartly there! What's happening? What's up? You've been here almost the whole day. What is the matter?"

"The matter," groused another of the tars, though he winked as he made the remark *sotto voce* to a comrade, lifting a hand to cover his lips and to shoot as it were or to direct the deep-toned whisper into his comrade's ear, and at the same time to prevent it reaching the Commander's. "'Ere he comes a-swaggerin' and a-blusterin' along when it's all as much as we can do to get one car up this 'ere mountain track—track is what they calls it, though a goat would find it 'ard to make his way over it. And 'ere are we a-sweatin' away hour in and hour out in the boilin sun, a-'eavin' the cars up when they should take themselves up by their own power. S'welp me!"

Sailor-like he had his grouse, and then laughed heartily and once more threw himself into the task. For, indeed, the armoured-car detachment had, on this particular ridge, struck a difficulty which was, we cannot say insurmountable—for no difficulty is insurmountable when the navy has to deal with it—but at any rate a difficulty of considerable proportions; for to advance into the enemy country, to carry out the reconnaissance, the sudden dash which had been ordered them, they must needs clamber to the top of this particular sandstone ridge and descend from it to the plain below. On that farther or western side the track led

down, zigzagging along the side of the ridge cut out of the sandstone itself, winding this way and that, taking advantage of every little hollow, and clinging to the side of the hill as it descended gently to the lower levels. But on this particular side—the eastern side, that more closely adjacent to the captured city of Erzerum—the track came up direct, presenting a rough, boulder-strewn and rock-obstructed surface, yet clambering so steeply that no car, however powerful the engine, was able to master the declivity.

But the handy-man had his own particular way of dealing with such matters, and had rigged a winch and lashed it in the most artful manner to a mass of boulders at the top. With a rope trailing from this down the track to the front dumb-iron of each of the armoured cars, the sailors brought them up finally by dint of stupendous labour, by much shouting and “heave-ho-ing” on the part of every man, to the top of the crest, where they were allowed to run a few yards over the summit, and rest till the others were brought up alongside them.

But thirty miles away lay that valley in which the Turkish general sat in his tent in judgment upon the prisoners captured within his lines, while the sinister Ernst Blott stood beside him; and, though the handy-men did not know it, in that same valley, at that moment, lay Jo—a particular favourite amongst them—and Guy Grammond, who, since his introduction to

Naval Armoured-car Detachment 275

their party, had become very popular. Imagine, then, the consternation if only the Commander—who, like his men, had taken a violent fancy to our hero—and his men had been aware of Guy's desperate position!

Yet they were ignorant that Guy lay there, condemned to be shot in the morning, and, having hoisted their cars to the summit, having posted pickets and sentries, they lit their fire on the eastern slope, so as not to attract attention, and presently were sitting down in the shade of the cars eating a meal and puffing their pipes to their hearts' content.

While the two groups of friends are thus relatively adjacent, yet for all practical purposes so immensely far apart, it may be profitable to digress for a short while, and to review in a few sentences the huge war now well on in its second year. For it was in 1914 that the Germans threw down their challenge practically to the whole world, while the period at which we write is the spring and early summer of 1916. What events had happened in that comparatively short space of time! No need to repeat how France had been invaded and Belgium occupied—all but the thinnest strip from Furnes down to the shattered city of Ypres! No need to remind the reader of how gallant France had stemmed the tide when it first overflowed her borders, and how, with the British Expeditionary Force, it had sealed it, stopped it, driven it back, until

276 The Armoured-car Scouts

only a twenty-fifth portion of France was occupied by the Teuton enemy, and for a while the best of the German army set at naught.

We have already detailed elsewhere in rough outline the course of the campaign in Russia, and have shown how, advancing first, the Russian army soon expended its ammunition, when, taking advantage of that fact, held up, as we have just said, on the Western front, the German hordes, with massed guns, blasted their way through Poland and into Russia.

We then, to complete the story, have but to remind the reader of Serbia's fate. Fighting a gallant fight at the commencement, she had more or less annihilated the Austrian squadrons sent across the Danube to invade her. Then, stricken by disease—by deadly typhus—she and the enemy had been forced to rest awhile till the scourge abated. By then Russia was forced back into her own territory; the Allied line in France stood firm, unyielding, yet demanding relatively small forces to prevent its advance. It was Serbia's turn, and now, invaded by a combined force of Germans and Austrians, her armies were scattered, forced to retreat, and the whole country was captured.

This leads us to another phase—the Dardanelles—which, as we have already mentioned, proved a gallant, yet unsuccessful, enterprise on the part of the British and French, for we failed to fight our way to

Naval Armoured-car Detachment 277

Constantinople. Yet there was another way of closing the German route to Turkey, and, in the long run, of gaining access for Russia to the Mediterranean. A force of French and British was concentrated at Salonika, in the Adriatic Gulf, close to Greece, and at the door-way of Bulgaria—that treacherous nation which, fair spoken to Britain and her Allies, chose a favourable moment to join the enemy, and had helped in the invasion of Serbia. However, from the Salonika base a blow might be struck at the long lines of communication joining Germany and Austria and Turkey, and we shall see later on how this force progressed.

For the moment we must turn aside to the west a little and remind our readers that yet another nation had joined in this Armageddon. Italy, waiting her time, eager to capture those provinces in the Trentino and the neighbourhood of Trieste which of right belonged to her, threw in her lot with the *Entente*, and was now battling for the freedom of all people, and for the same cause for which Britain and Russia and France were fighting.

Were we so inclined, we could mention other spheres of active operations, for fighting was still going on in parts of Africa, where German colonies were slowly being subjected. But we keep our attention closely to the European and Mid-Eastern fronts, which of themselves are sufficiently perplexing. We

have spoken of those fronts already, and would merely refer to that where Guy and his friends were now fighting.

Already it has been narrated how the Grand Duke Nicholas came with his Caucasian troops over that mountain range, slid down into Erzerum, and captured what was before considered to be an impregnable city. Then the Russian troops descended into lower Armenia, and, at the stage at which we have arrived, were forcing their way westward, still eight hundred miles perhaps from Constantinople, yet on the road, gallantly attempting to arrive at their destination.

We can fittingly end this little digression by now advancing our narrative just a trifle in point of time, and giving information of events of vast importance actually taking place at that moment or about to commence. Verdun, the pivot-stone of the whole French line, had been attacked on 21st February in overwhelming force by the Germans, almost precisely at the time when this armoured-car detachment had slipped over the Caucasian passes into the city of Erzerum. For six months and more fighting continued in that neighbourhood, till Germany had advanced her lines just a trifle, till she had expended some 600,000 of her soldiers, and all to no purpose.

And all the while the British line, now ninety miles in length, had made scarcely a move, had not ventured

to create a diversion, had stood there behind its trenches, watching and waiting, admiring the resolution of the French, and applauding their gallantry in front of Verdun. But the summer came, and, as the 1st of July arrived, there commenced on the Somme operations of such magnitude that they alone provide historic matter sufficient to fill many a volume. We only refer to those operations here. They progressed steadily for months on end till the end of 1916 and beyond it. They crushed the German line, broke it and pulverized it by the action of guns of huge calibre and thousands in number, and drove the Kaiser's hordes steadily backwards.

A glance round the various fronts at this moment—the summer of 1916, to which we have allowed ourselves to advance our story—shows this terrific fighting on the Somme in full blast; renewed fighting at Verdun, where the French hurled the Germans out of their captured positions; fighting along that long front in Galicia, where the Austrians lost some 300,000 prisoners to the Russians; still more fighting in the Trentino, where an Austrian attempt to break into the lines of communication of the Italians was successfully parried, and was followed by operations in the Carso, of huge proportions, which gave much territory to our Italian ally and caused Austria immense losses in lives and material. Add to this, fighting of a desultory nature in Mesopotamia, in Asiatic Turkey, where

Guy was stationed, in German colonies, where British troops and others were routing out the Huns, and one can imagine that Germany and her Allies were becoming hard pressed, and that that ambitious scheme to dominate the world which had caused them to commence this war was already defeated. Germany and the Austrians were, indeed, now in the position of defenders struggling hard to keep out enemies whom before they had despised, and who as they had taken for granted at the commencement of this war, would be easily conquered.

“Hist! Hist! Hist!” A gentle whistle reached the ears of the commander of that section of the British armoured-car detachment which had travelled so far from England to help our Russian ally, and caused him to prick up his ears, to arrest one hand, on its way to his lips with a glowing cigarette, and to drop the other on the butt of his revolver. “Hist!” A sound came again from somewhere on his left, while a moment later he heard someone stealthily creeping up from behind him, and, swinging round, was just in time to detect in the gloom the figure of one of his men—one of those lusty sailors—rifle in hand, who had also been alarmed.

“Someone a-creepin’ up close to us!” the gallant fellow told his officer in a hoarse whisper. “I’ve been a-listenin’ this ’arf-hour. It’s someone who’s a-tryin’ to attract our attention.”

The glowing cigarette dropped to the ground, and the Commander put a resolute foot upon it.

"Stop!" he whispered. "Make no sound, but have your rifle ready! Now, listen!"

He gave vent to a low whistle—a gentle invitation, as it were, to the mysterious person, who had sent that signal to him, to come forth from the darkness which surrounded the temporary encampment occupied by the naval detachment, this camp clinging to the crest of the sandstone cliff up which the cars had been dragged after such enormous labour. Once more he sent out the whistle, and then he and the sailor beside him heard the signal flung back, and listened to the soft, almost imperceptible footfalls of someone approaching. Presently a figure stood up before them, the figure of a man who breathed hard, as if he had been climbing up by some precipitous path, and had so gained the position.

"Master," the man whispered, "it is Mustapha."

"Ah!"

The Commander gave vent to a smothered exclamation, for the voice had rather startled him, and, smiling now, dropped the revolver back into the pouch which held it, and pulled the flap over the butt.

"Not required!" he told himself. "A friend has reached us."

"Well now, Mustapha! What news? You were

sent forward to gain tidings of the Turks. What news have you? Sit down here and have a cigarette, if you will accept one made in England!"

This individual, known to the Russian General Staff by the single name of Mustapha, was one of those mysterious persons who, somehow or other, seem to be attached to the General Staff of every army. Mysterious individuals, indeed, who spring up, as it were, at the feet of the armies, who can speak often enough half a dozen languages, and who, faithful enough to those who employ them, work hard, and undertake almost any reasonable risk for the liberal payment which is made to them.

Mustapha, half Armenian, perhaps half Turk, with some Kurdish blood and even a little Russian in his veins, had arrived at the quarters occupied by the Russian General Staff almost as soon as that staff had taken up its position in the captured city of Erzerum. For weeks past now the faithful servant of the Grand Duke Nicholas had been investigating that very country which Guy and his friends had penetrated, yet not, so far, with great success.

"Master!" said this mysterious individual, whose features were invisible to the Commander till perhaps a minute later, when, having lit his cigarette by means of a match struck under the shelter of a rock, he sat himself in front of the sailor, and, pulling at the weed, caused the end to glow so that it illuminated

his face. "Master," he said again, "I am but just come from the valley yonder—down over there," and he pointed to the west, forgetful for the moment that his signal was invisible.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Commander. "Yonder, to our west, the direction for which we are making. Good, then! But listen! We have orders to make a reconnaissance in that direction, to make a dash if need be. Tell us what enemies we are likely to meet with?"

"Then hearken to my tale!" said Mustapha. "Yonder, perhaps twenty miles from this point, there is encamped a weak Turkish division, commanded by a man who is but an indifferent commander. I was there on the outskirts of the camp this very morning, and learned that, even now, more than a half of the division is marching north to reinforce Turkish troops in the neighbourhood of Trebizond. Thus, Master, less than half a weak Turkish division will remain under an indifferent commander!"

"Ah!"

Once again the Commander gave vent to that half-whispered exclamation, while his brows puckered thoughtfully.

"Less than half a weak Turkish division! Say five thousand, perhaps?"

"No," declared Mustapha, "not that number, Master; less even than that."

284 The Armoured-car Scouts

“Say three thousand troops, then? Mustapha, describe the position of the camp. Tell us all you can about them; let us know where the pickets are stationed.”

Sitting there on the rock on which the man had found him, the officer listened to the pigeon-English of this Russian spy, and learned first that the Turkish division occupying that distant hollow was scattered in a number of camps, scattered, indeed, in quite half a dozen, and that some of those were by that time undoubtedly evacuated. He learned, in addition, that discipline was lax, that a careful watch was not always kept, for the Turks deemed themselves in that position quite secure from their Russian enemies. Yet, favourable though that might be for a sudden dash on the part of this armoured-car detachment, there were still huge odds. For what were half a dozen armoured cars compared with, say, at least three thousand Turkish infantry?”

“A mere drop in the ocean!” the Commander grumbled, yet smiled as he grumbled. “And one mustn’t forget that they are Turkish infantry, which means that they are slow, and won’t be able to get over the ground at anything like the speed which we can accomplish. One moment, Mustapha, another cigarette! Ah, it’s well alight! Now, tell me this: the road here leading down the side of the cliff is good, for I have prospected it almost to the bottom.

Beyond that I have traced almost every foot of it, as far as it can be seen, through my glasses, and know that it is smooth and unobstructed, while the dry weather we have had has made it hard, so that it will give us good going. But, four miles or so from here it curves round a hill yonder and is lost to view. What then? What happens to it? Is it in good condition farther on right up to the camp occupied by this Turkish division?"

Almost breathlessly, the Commander and the handy-man, still squatting beside him with his rifle at the ready, listened as this mysterious personage, who had come to them so strangely in the darkness, gave his answer, speaking in a soft sing-song voice, which was altogether pleasant. For upon that answer depended many things, depended, indeed, whether the Commander—as gallant a fellow as could be met in the Royal Navy—could legitimately take his men forward, and whether this reconnaissance would be indeed as successful as he and every one of his men intended.

The man gave vent to a low laugh, as if he were delighted, indeed, to answer the question favourably.

"Master, it is well! I who know what these strange cars of yours can do, who indeed have travelled upon them and gloried in doing so, I say, without fear of contradiction, that yonder to the west

of us the track leads on broad and smooth and unobstructed as you have already discovered, and beyond the hill, round which it bends and becomes thus invisible, it still stretches on unbroken, as good as could be wished, till it runs into, and through, and beyond, the camp occupied by the remnants of that Turkish division. Strike, Master! Here is an opportunity. Let the Turks see that the British and the Russians can reach them, even in the heart of their own country."

"By Gad!" exclaimed the Commander, pulling hard at his cigarette, while he heard the handy-man at his elbow breathing still more heavily, heard him, indeed, growling out some exclamation. "Blimy!" it was, to be exact.

"Lor', if this don't mean a picnic! Just the very chance—eh, sir?" he breathed rather loudly.

"Eh?—what?" demanded the Commander.

"Beg parding, sir, but ain't it jest the chance?" demanded the handy-man, a little perturbed by being so suddenly taken up, as it were, yet standing to his guns and eager, if possible, to throw in this one little word of encouragement, if indeed it were needed, just some little remark which might turn the balance, and induce his officer to undertake an expedition, which the sailor knew well enough would meet with the hearty support of his comrades.

Yet, in his heart of hearts, the gallant fellow knew

well enough that no word of encouragement was needed where his Commander was concerned, for, long since, this naval officer had demonstrated to his men that where dash was required he was as full of that virtue as was any one of them. But his position and theirs were entirely and utterly different; they were to fight, to work, to obey, to follow their leader unhesitatingly, and he, that leader, was there responsible for the lives of every one of them, responsible for those armoured cars, responsible, indeed, for all that happened. Thus, as in the case of every officer, he had learned long since to temper dash with a modicum of reason, though he and many a man like him knew only too well how hard it was at times to reason, how difficult to sit still, as it were, and consider matters, instead of dashing pell-mell into the midst of some danger. The sailor breathed harder still, clenched one huge fist, and almost ground his teeth.

"Now if I was you, sir——" he began deferentially, desperately, and a little hesitatingly.

"You're not!" declared the Commander abruptly.

"Hold your tongue, James!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"And," continued the Commander, still speaking only just above a whisper, "pass the order for the men to stand to their cars and get their engines going. Mustapha, you can return to head-quarters

if you like, or you can come along with us and help to guide us."

"You ain't a-goin' to, sir——" began the sailor again, almost bubbling over with enjoyment as he heard the order issued to him.

"You'll be under arrest in another moment," the Commander snapped. "That means that you'll be left here on the crest to cook breakfast against the time we return."

He heard the gasp the gallant fellow beside him gave, and then the noise made by his feet as the sailor stood upright and ran across to where the armoured cars were standing, from which point there reached his ear, a few seconds later, the distant growl of the man as he hurriedly, jubilantly, and almost breathlessly gave his message. Now, if we follow that handy fellow it will do us no harm for the instant, for it will demonstrate to us, at any rate, the enthusiasm which filled every man of this armoured-car detachment. It was the sleeping form of one of his comrades that the sailor first dropped upon—stumbled over, indeed—and then, kneeling down beside him, shook with a roughness which made the man's teeth rattle.

"Gurr! Gurr! Leave off!" the man would have shouted, had not his enthusiastic comrade clapped a huge hand over his gaping mouth; and then managed to gasp when he had quite recovered from the fright

which he had suffered owing to this sudden awakening, and felt assured that this was no Kurd or marauding Turk come to murder him in his sleep:

"What's up? Who the blazes are you? What's wanting that you can't wake a man in decent style?"

"Yer blitherer!" growled the excited messenger, shaking him again till his wretched victim's teeth rattled aloud. "Yer blitherer! I say, stand to yer hengine! Don't I tell yer that the Commander's given horders to set things a-goin', for we're bent on a rush down on the enemy! Wake up, won't yer!"

Wake up! Indeed, the unfortunate fellow upon whom he had stumbled—one of the drivers, as it happened—was as wideawake as he was ever likely to be, and, indeed, at that precise moment was filled to bursting-point with indignation at the rough treatment he had received. He made a grab at the dark figure kneeling above him, caught the sailor by the neck, and on any other occasion would have followed this up by a grab with the other hand, and perhaps an angry tussle. But that message changed his intention in the most amazing manner.

"Gurr!" his teeth snapped again, and "What the —'ere—start our engines? Get out o' this!" he began to shout. Then, remembering the need for silence, lowered his voice, barged the messenger aside, and rushed to carry out the Commander's orders. Within the space of two minutes his comrades and

290 The Armoured-car Scouts

chums were also ready, the drivers in their seats, steering-wheels in hands, feet on the pedals, and all in readiness, the crews standing by prepared for any eventuality.

"Well, Mustapha," continued the Commander, still sitting grimly upon the boulder which he had occupied, and puffing reflectively at his cigarette; "you come with us, or do you return?"

"I go with you, Master, for I know that road which you must traverse, and it may be that just a word from me may save a disaster."

"Disaster! Thank you! But we are out for victory, not for trouble. Well, pile up on the leading car. Now, boys," began the Commander in a low voice, as he rejoined his detachment, "no smoking, no gossiping, just silence, and follow your leader—that's my car. No need for lights, for up here it seems to me that we shall be able to see without great difficulty, and if we go slowly we are hardly likely to run off the road. Then go slowly is the order! Follow my car, which will set the pace."

There came the gentle clang of steel-coated doors, snapping to as the occupants of the cars took their places; the buzz and hum of accelerated engines, the curious snapping, grinding sound of studded tyres, which they make as they grip the road, and, as it were, toss it backward, or, to be more exact, push the car onward. They were off, clutches hardly en-

Naval Armoured-car Detachment 291

gaged, for, once the cars got into motion, they rolled silently down the hill at a slow, steady pace—the driver of the leading car, with his eyes glued upon the irregular edge of the track, the driver of the car which followed pursuing him relentlessly, and so on till the last one came—brought up every now and again with the brake, slowed down at curves, but for all that going steadily downwards, just as steadily as the dawn came flushing out of the east and began to lighten the valley into which they were dropping. Yet not dawn, but only the signal of its coming. In two hours perhaps it would be quite light; in an hour a man might see another a hundred yards away. And now? Well, the light made it possible to follow the road, and that was all. One could also see the dull outline of the cars; while in those same cars, with steel-protecting plates thrust backwards, thus allowing their heads and shoulders to emerge, the handy-men stood about those conning-turrets which topped each vehicle, patting their guns, keeping a weather-eye out in all directions, murmuring their thoughts to one another—everyone eager for the coming encounter.

CHAPTER XVI

At Early Sunrise

"CONDEMNED to be shot in the morning! To be shot in the early morning!"

Guy shivered and doubled himself up on the blankets which had been tossed into the tent which he was occupying.

"To be shot in the very early morning! Ugh!"

We must endeavour faithfully to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the most absolute truth when describing Guy Grammond, and we should be failing disastrously in our duty were we not to inform our readers that Guy, at the moment of which we are writing—somewhere about midnight of that eventful day when he had been condemned, thanks to the machinations of that scoundrel who had robbed and murdered his father—was shivering with apprehension, as any other young fellow would have done. And why not? No braver, no more stoical, loving his life no less than any other man, that fearful prospect before him, the death which was to be dealt to him

early in the coming morning, weighed on his mind, crushed his spirits and his courage for the moment.

“Condemned to be shot in the morning! Ah! And why? A spy? Condemned as a spy? Me—Guy Grammond? A spy? No, no! I’m ready to undertake work, however dangerous, behind the enemy’s lines; but go as a spy, dressed in some disguise, do what the term spy usually implies—that is, behave in the meanest possible manner, extract secrets by dishonest measures—no! never!”

From contemplating the fate in store for him, from listening to that voice which seemed every second to shout and bellow the sentence pronounced upon him, he began to look at the situation from a different point of view. It was not life alone which was at stake; it was his honour—Guy Grammond’s honour. And very soon the thought, the knowledge, that it was to be sullied, was to be smudged by the action of a man who was but a common murderer as well as a thief, roused our hero from the depths of despair into which he had fallen, and indignation took the place of fear. He waxed more wrathful every moment, and, getting red-hot with anger, stood to his feet and stamped round the tent, his temples burning, his hands clenched, all his thoughts fixed upon avenging himself upon that dastardly German for the cruel trick he had played upon him.

“He succeeded once when I had nothing to do

with the matter—he caught my unsuspecting father out, and robbed and murdered him; and now he's caught me out, given false evidence against me, and—yes! I can see the whole plot now—to get rid of me, to clear away any chance there might be of my bringing up this crime against him, he practically compels that effete old Turkish commander to pronounce sentence upon me! Bah!”

Like a caged lion he prowled up and down the tent, barging into the sides, running his head against the canvas, muttering, swinging his arms—behaving, indeed, in a manner very unlike that usually adopted by Guy Grammond.

“Halt! What's that? Stand still!”

The doorway of the tent was torn apart of a sudden, and a Turkish lamp was swung into the interior at the end of a soldier's arm, while the head of another man was thrust into the doorway, and before it a gleaming bayonet.

“Hold!” commanded the sergeant of the guard, looking bewildered as he watched Guy. “What's amiss? What ails you, man? Come! we will send you a drink of water! The fellow is distraught,” he told his men when he got back to the group of Turks told off to watch this prisoner. “He's raving there like a madman. Take water to him, one of you, and some food, which perhaps will quieten him down and bring him to his reason.”

But it was not the food and the drink which they took to their prisoner—and handed to him, indeed, in a manner far more gentle and considerate than they had displayed to him before—that quietened Guy Grammond. It was the voice of the sergeant, the sudden interruption, which broke his thoughts, and that gleaming bayonet which reminded him of the men who stood guard over him. From feeling first of all bewildered at this sudden sentence, so undeserved, so cruel, which had been passed upon him, and then drifting to a condition of fiery indignation at the underhand way in which the German had treated him, and the monstrous manner in which he had been proclaimed a spy, and thereby was likely to have that honour, which he prized so much, sullied, Guy grew thoughtful and scheming all of a sudden, and let his mind turn in an entirely different direction. Every ounce of his being now was engaged in plotting a scheme whereby he might break his bonds, whereby he might beat his executioners, and, most of all, that Ernst Blott, that foul German.

“But how? But how?” he asked himself times without number, and then, throwing himself on his rugs as he heard stealthy footsteps approaching, let his head fall on to one arm, and, curling up comfortably, pretended sleep.

A head was thrust into the tent, a gleaming bayonet stabbed the air inside, and was followed by

the face of a Turkish soldier, and once more the sergeant's voice was heard, but this time lowered in a whisper, as if he feared to wake the prisoner.

"So! So! So! The trick has worked, by Allah! And the food he has eaten and the water he has drunk will keep him sleeping till morning—that is, if Allah wills, for he has power over all things. Let him lie! Come away, comrade; yours is an easy task for the rest of the time that you are on duty. Heigh-ho! A man feels sleepy on a job of this sort!"

Guy heard the fellow yawn loudly, and in a different tone the answering yawn of the soldier who had accompanied the sergeant. If he could have peeped outside the tent he would have seen the two standing there—the sergeant, his hands on his hips, his arms akimbo; and the soldier, both arms stretched out, one gripping his rifle, his mouth wide open, the faint rays from a mere crescent of the moon making his features partially visible. At their feet stood the lamp, spluttering, the candle almost consumed, and, perhaps twenty feet away, the rays showed a huddled group of figures, mere heaps of brown, beneath which slumbered their comrades.

Guy leapt silently from his blankets and ran to the side of the tent; then, lifting the canvas with a swift movement, and pushing his head as close to the ground as was possible, he stared out, and almost at

once caught sight of the man who had just paid him a visit.

"Heigh-ho!" yawned the sergeant, a huge, good-natured looking fellow.

"Heigh-ho!" echoed the soldier, going off again into a tremendous yawn, which stretched his whole frame and brought his rifle high up above his head so that the bayonet gleamed there in the rays of the moon.

"A fellow feels sleepy," repeated the sergeant.

"By Allah! a fellow might well feel sleepy, Sergeant," the soldier responded. "See, now, what need to watch at all?"

The sergeant almost shouted in his indignation.

"What, you who are posted as sentry over the prisoner ask me such a question? But wait! Why watch too closely when a prisoner is but a worm like this fellow—is cowed—so that he is of no danger, and, if he were not cowed, is reduced to a condition bordering on mania? Listen, here, listen!"

Under the feeble rays of the moon this huge subject of the Sultan lifted one big, bony finger to the side of his nose—a somewhat prominent organ—and tapped it in the most knowing manner.

"Listen, my brave comrade! Because this spy—this unfortunate beggar—is such a miserable creature, though there is still need to watch, there is, for all

that, some chance of relaxing our efforts. See here, now, we will strike a bargain!"

"A bargain! Yes, certainly, by Allah! A bargain!"

"Now this is it: I, who have been slaving here all the evening, bearing the responsibility of this rascal whom we watch, will lie down to sleep. You, my brave fellow——"

"Ah! Now we come to it," grinned the soldier. "Well, Sergeant?"

"You," continued the sergeant impressively, holding on to the belt of the soldier and rocking the fellow backwards and forwards gently, "you my best brother, shall rest also."

"Ah! Rest! That is good hearing, I shall sleep—eh?"

"Sleep! No," said the sergeant; "not that, for that will lead us both into trouble. But you have my permission to stand here instead of marching backwards and forwards, and, within an hour of this, you may waken the next man for duty, who can, in his turn, again rouse a comrade when another hour has passed. That is a bargain—eh?"

The eyes of the Turkish soldier twinkled, he even indulged in a little grin.

"For you, Sergeant, certainly, by Allah! For you it is a great bargain, for you will sleep throughout the night; and for me——"

"Well, for you?" blustered the sergeant.

"For me it is at any rate reduction of my hours of duty. Good, it shall be so! Sleep well, Sergeant!"

Guy watched the two as they parted, the sergeant turning abruptly and striding off till he had passed beyond that irregular heap—that heap of blankets, beneath which slumbered the guard. Then he cast his eyes on the soldier who had agreed to the terms of his non-commissioned officer. Compared with the sergeant, the fellow was a weed, shorter by a head, perhaps, with sloping shoulders and knees which tended to knock together; a weed, who carried his rifle clumsily, whose dress was untidy, whose accoutrements stuck out from him in many directions, abruptly, giving him the appearance of a porcupine which has been half-plucked of its quills but still retains a few. But, weed or no weed, above his head gleamed more than a foot of naked steel—his fixed bayonet—and even a weed can use such a weapon, while no doubt the breech of his rifle contained a live cartridge, and one pressure of his finger on the trigger would bring him instant protection.

Guy lay there with his face glued to the ground, the fingers of one hand lifting the flap of the tent, his eyes fixed upon the sentry, and his thoughts far away.

"It's got to be done somehow, and no one can have a better chance than I have," he thought. "I'm not worrying so much about getting out of this hole as I

300 The Armoured-car Scouts

am about clearing away from the camp, and, besides, I've got to remember Jo and Nicholas. Of course, naturally enough, I couldn't leave the place without seeing what's happened to them, and giving them a lift up."

No, a young fellow of Guy's character could not very well do such a thing as forsake those comrades of his who had accompanied him on this adventurous mission. Yet, seen in cold print, considered carefully, and with all the facts before him, to the average man no doubt this determination of his would appear to be quixotic perhaps, or he might even declare that term to be far from strong enough, and might easily employ the word foolish, or idiotic.

"Yes, a fellow couldn't go away from the place without looking up his friends and taking them along with him," Guy decided. "And the job is not likely to be an easy one either, for, though I saw them marched back to the old tent which we occupied when we first arrived, they may very well have been removed to another; and, even if not, it will be hard to come upon their prison and pick it out from amongst so many other tents which dot the camp. What's that? Men marching! A bugle, I do believe! I can hear orders being shouted."

He heard the tramp of hundreds of feet a little later, and, still at his post, peering from beneath the flap of his tent, watched the sentry stare and walk

towards his slumbering comrades, where he paused again, evidently listening. Then he strode back towards the tent, and Guy heard him muttering. A moment later a head was thrust up from amongst those heavily blanketed forms, within easy distance of the tent, and the sergeant's voice broke the silence.

"What now?" he asked. "What has happened? I heard sounds!"

"Sounds of our troops moving. You forget, Sergeant," called out the sentry, "that half, and more than half, of the division is moving to another camp, and has been ordered to march during the cool hours. Sleep, my sergeant, all is well!"

"All is well within the tent—eh? The prisoner is there, slumbering still? Put your head in and have a look at him," commanded the sergeant. "Better still, put your head in every quarter of an hour and so make sure that you have him. Come, the lamp is here; fetch it!"

The soldier at once went off towards the spot where the sergeant was lying, while Guy dropped the flap of the tent.

"Going to bring a lamp. Then I'd better clear off before he gets it. Wait, though! They might spot me as I left the place. No, I'll let the fellow have a look at me first to make quite sure. Why not?"

Lifting the flap again, Guy watched the man take the lantern from the sergeant and set light to the

302 The Armoured-car Scouts

candle within it. Then, as he returned towards the tent, our hero fled back to his blankets, sprawled upon them in much the same position as he had occupied before, and let his head loll back on one of his arms. It was so that the soldier discovered him, a minute later, when, pulling the canvas door of the tent open with one hand, he pushed his lantern in with the other and viewed his prisoner.

“Fast asleep, by Allah! The fellow sleeps as peacefully now as he will sleep within a few hours, when death has come to him. Well, well! Let him sleep! I would wish no greater peace if I were like him; and, seeing that he is to die so soon, I can wish him well, though he is an enemy.”

An enemy indeed! A cool, scheming, calculating, and extremely diligent and busy enemy, the Turk would have thought had he chanced to push his lantern in some two minutes later. For Guy was now working at high pressure, working out a scheme which had come to him like a flash, working out a plan upon which he had dropped all of a sudden. Seated on his bed of blankets, and using the knife which his captors had omitted to take from him, he was slitting his blankets into long ragged strips, six feet in length, about four inches wide, strong enough to bear a steady pull from two lusty individuals pulling in opposite directions. Taking one of these, he threaded it under his shoulder-strap, and allowed the

two ends to dangle in front and behind; another followed until he had four of them in position; and then once more he went to the flap of the tent and peered out at the sentry. The man was standing there almost motionless, though, as Guy watched, he saw the weedy figure of the Turk swaying ever so gently, as if, indeed, the soft breeze blowing through the camp threatened to disturb his equilibrium. His rifle was slung on one shoulder by the sling, the bayonet pushing up into the air, gleaming in the moon's rays and sparkling.

For the rest, the man's back was turned towards the tent in which his prisoner lay sleeping; while, if that prisoner could have insinuated himself as it were into the thoughts of this Turk, he would have discovered that before the eyes of the man—dreamy, sleepy eyes—was spread out, not the dimly lit camp nestling in that wide valley, not the canvas which sheltered those of his comrades of the division who still remained, but a vista of green trees, through which babbled a wide stream of clear and limpid water, swirling against brown rocks and flashing back the rays of the gorgeous sun. Beneath those trees, too, there was a Turkish house with a wonderfully cool balcony, and on that same balcony a divan of luxurious dimensions on which reclined a Turkish woman, veiled to the eyes, smiling, beckoning, while behind her stood an African boy fanning her with a

304 The Armoured-car Scouts

fan of huge proportions. It was the sort of Elysium which this romantic Turk had conjured up in his mind since the days of his youth, since the days, perhaps, when his mother had regaled him with fairy stories. True, such an abode as that, such a wife, were hardly ever likely to be his, even were he to live to the age of a hundred. For the man was poor, never likely to be rich, and it was hardly possible that his possessions would ever be worth envying.

But if a man be not rich in possessions, it costs nothing to have a vivid imagination. and, after all, such an imagination may supply compensation to those in humble places. This enchanting scene was costing the Turk nothing, while it rejoiced his heart, and set his thoughts on other things and other places far more entertaining than this tented valley and his comrades.

“Half asleep! He’d be fast asleep if he were stretched on the ground,” said Guy as he peered at the fellow. “What’s he done with the lantern? He’s blown it out! That’s all the better for me and all the worse for him. The time has come to put the scheme into execution!”

Very craftily he set to work to unfasten the ropes which closed the door of his prison, leaving them just hooked over the catch sewn to the canvas, so that anyone attempting to enter would merely have to push the canvas door aside, and then there would be

nothing to obstruct him. Then Guy coughed, and began to beat the tightly stretched canvas with one hand, causing it to give out a gentle, yet penetrating sound, which at once reached the ear of the sentry. The man turned his head and leaned towards his lantern, which he had blown out and placed close at hand; then, hearing the sound continue, and of a sudden fearing that his prisoner was attempting to escape, he turned right round, peered at the tent rather anxiously, and then ran towards it.

Could Guy have suddenly leapt into space and flown, as it were, from that spot and the valley occupied by the remnants of that Turkish division, he might, had he directed his wings towards that sandstone ridge whereon the armoured-car detachment had been posted that evening, have seen a sight which would have caused him to shout with joy and to cheer his naval comrades. For almost at the moment when the sentry ran towards the tent, attracted by the noise Guy was making, the cars, having crept carefully down the hill at a pace so slow that it was positively irksome to the fretting sailors, now took the road across the plain, and, speeding up, came humming along in a way which soon caused the miles to fly behind them.

Why! Supposing Guy were not to effect his escape? Supposing, instead, this sentry, about to peer in and
(c 888) 20

306 The Armoured-car Scouts

discover what was happening, found his prisoner once more consumed with fear and apprehension? Supposing, in short and in fact, the contemplated escape was abruptly put a stop to? Even then there was a chance for our hero. For if ever a commander meant business, the Commander of the armoured-car detachment did, as he and his men set their cars sprinting across the open.

Yet what a desperate chance the coming of the handy-men aboard their armoured cars offered to Guy Grammond! For we must recollect that he was just as ignorant of the proximity of his friends as they were of his peril, and had not even a shadow of a suspicion that they were in the neighbourhood. Who, indeed, could have imagined for one moment, one sensible moment, in fact, that a mere handful of men would venture into this wide valley and into this country peopled by the Turkish soldiers? Yet Guy and his two friends had not hesitated to take the road which cut into the heart of the enemy's country, and, if they could do so, what was likely to frighten the Commander and crews of those celebrated armoured cars which had now created no little reputation on the Turkish front, and had set Kurds and Turks and Armenians talking, from the heights of the Caucasus down to the plains of Lower Armenia?

If you had been aboard the leading car as that thin crescent of the moon cast shadows of rocks athwart

the sinuous road, you would have noticed a stern yet jovial face peering from a wide aperture just below the revolving turret. It was the Commander—a cigarette in his mouth, though it was unlighted, his eyes fixed on the distant valley now beginning to open up, and his thoughts very much in the future.

“Wake her up a bit!” he called to the driver, a short, square, rather wizened young man, whose coolness was now quite proverbial.

“Yes, sir! Wake her up, sir! Come up, me daisy!”

And “come up” the huge Rolls-Royce did, the engine accelerating with that smooth giant force characteristic of this auto-car, while the vehicle itself seemed to shoot forward, though no extra sound came from the mechanism. Like a ghost, like that silver ghost, indeed, the predecessor of the modern car of this make, this vehicle, painted a dull grey, steel-coated, and ominous of appearance, went rolling along the road at a speed which was hardly believable, so smooth was the running.

“Lights!” exclaimed the Commander laconically.

“Lights ahead!” repeated one of his men.

“Lights!” came from a handy-man in the turret who manœuvred the machine-gun.

But the driver never moved so much as a muscle. If he saw those lights, as undoubtedly he did, his eyes never even blinked, nor did his toe relax its pres-

308 The Armoured-car Scouts

sure on the accelerator pedal. His job was to carry the car forward safely, swiftly, and as he had been bidden. If there were lights ahead—enemy lights—what of it? If those lights signified Turkish soldiers, guns, rifles, bullets, and a coming action, what, then, of it?

“All in the day’s work!” the calm, collected little fellow was telling himself, as, lifting a hand from his steering-wheel, he pushed the peak of his cap a little farther backward. “In half an hour, I should say, we shall be up to those lights. Jim, get ready to close down the radiator covers.”

Like other armoured cars, this huge beast was not only protected by sheet-armour around those parts which covered the crew, but her vital organs were also wrapped in steel, and the radiator which cooled her engine, perhaps one of the most vulnerable points of the vehicle, was possessed of folding doors of steel, open, as a general rule, for air was needed to cool the engine, yet capable of being shut in a moment, and of so protecting the radiator from bullets.

“Slow down!” commanded the officer.

“Slow down!” repeated the man beside him.

“Slow down it is!” echoed the driver, taking his foot from the accelerator.

And behind the leading car those which followed, though they had not heard the order, obeyed nevertheless, and conformed to the movements of the leader.

For those lights were now much nearer. Of a sudden the valley, in which Guy and his friends lay prisoners, had opened out, and the armoured cars were, as it were, at the threshold of the enemy's head-quarters. And still the Commander and his men knew nothing of Guy and Jo and Nicholas, did not even suspect that those three gallant young fellows who had gone forward into the enemy's country were so near, in so great need of their assistance.

Of Guy Grammond's need it would be superfluous to make any further mention. There he was in that tent, alone, unarmed, under sentence of death, with that sentry outside advancing to discover what ailed the prisoner within, and what was the cause of the noise which had alarmed him.

What, then, of Jo and Nicholas, imprisoned elsewhere in the camp, a prey to the most dreadful forebodings? Read on, and we shall learn what happened to them.

CHAPTER XVII

A Cruel Disappointment

It was dark save for that crescent of the moon which floated high overhead and poured its gentle beams down upon the camp, upon the tent occupied by Guy, and alike on that occupied by Jo and his comrade. Looking into that tent, the guard had seen the two prisoners fast asleep but an hour before the time of which we have been writing. What would he have thought had he peered in at the identical moment when that sentry was about to investigate the commotion he had heard in the prison occupied by the man condemned as a spy, the man to be shot in the morning?

“Nicholas! Say, Nicholas, you’re awake?”

“Awake! Can a man sleep then so easily?” growled the Russian. Not that he was a bad-tempered sort of individual, as a general rule, but now he was worked up till his nerves were at full tension, till his muscles were stretched firm and taut, till his whole frame was like a highly-tempered spring, which much bending, too much bending, a little more stress than

it had suffered already, would perhaps cause to snap entirely.

“As if a man could sleep when this sort of thing is going on! Can you then expect an old comrade of Guy’s to put his head on a pillow and seek forgetfulness when his friend has but a few hours left in which to live? Gurr!”

Nicholas expressed his disgust in no measured manner, in low tones, it is true, and with a final exclamation which could not penetrate to the ears of the guard outside. But, hardly more than whispered though it was, it was plainly indicative of his innermost and deepest feelings.

“Hur!” growled Jo. “Who’s accusin’ you of goin’ to sleep?”

“You did!”

“Me! I accuse you? Now look ’ere, young shaver, beggin’ yer parding, for you are an officer and I’m only a handy-man sort of fellow; still I don’t take accusations not from no one! Who said you’d been asleep?” repeated Jo in his most quarrelsome voice, a voice which his comrades seldom heard, and then, as a general rule, only when annoyance was simulated.

Nicholas put his hand out in the darkness, and gripped the sailor’s arm.

“You didn’t,” he said. “I wouldn’t accuse you of saying such a thing for any money, Jo. Neither of us could sleep, or think of sleep, while there is

this awful nightmare hanging over our heads. But what can we do to help Guy? Good gracious me! Just think of it! Condemned as a spy, and by the machinations of that German!—Herr Blott! Ernst Blott! A German, I tell you! A murderer, I tell you! A robber! A villain!”

“A Hun! Oh! I could add a few words to him,” declared Jo bitterly, for Nicholas had already given him the details known about Ernst Blott, and had told the honest if impulsive little sailor of the manner in which the German had treated our hero, and how he had first murdered his father, and had then endeavoured to cover all traces of his guilt by creating a conflagration. “Hun! It is a term that’s not half bad enough for the likes of him, and many more of these Germans. But we won’t worry about him, only—yes—only if I ever break loose, and come up alongside that Blott fellow, I’ll ‘Blott’ him,” said Jo, doubling his fists, though Nicholas could not see him in the darkness. “I’ll ‘Blott’ him clean out of existence,” growled the little sailor. “But——”

“But, we’ve got to worry about Guy, not about this German!”

“Aye, aye! So we have! so we have!” assented Jo, pulling his cap off and digging his strong, stumpy little fingers into his hair, and smoothing the small, round patch of baldness on the top of his head, “so we have mate!—I mean, Mr. Nicholas—so

we have, indeed! I've been puzzling these hours past."

"And I, but can think of nothing."

"If we were to break out now—cut a way through the tent, and make a rush for it—should we be better off?" asked Jo.

"Not a bit! For I take it that, if we could get beyond this tent as free men, our first task would be to find Guy's prison, and then to set about his rescue."

"That's it! That's what I've been aiming at trying to think out all the time," gasped Jo, at his wit's end long since, desperate now that the question was under discussion. "But d'yer think I'm goin' to sit here all night, sweatin' at the thought, and just go on sittin' here till the dawn comes up, and till I hear the rifles crack that'll shoot him? Not me! Not me, Mr. Nicholas!" said Jo, his voice tending to rise, till a grip from the Russian officer reminded him that caution was necessary.

"D'yer think I'll stay here as silent as a mouse, without doing anything, and will take my breakfast in the morning—if those Turks bring it—knowing that I'm just as worthy of death as our chum over there, and that, if anyone ought to be shot as a spy, why, it's me—the oldest of the party—and not him, the youngest, and if you'll excuse me saying it, Mr. Nicholas, the finest?"

A gentle squeeze again told him that he had the

Russian's sympathy. For if Jo had taken a vast fancy to Guy these months past, had been veritably his shadow, had metaphorically and absolutely resided in one or other of his pockets, till he began to know our hero's inmost thoughts, and could tell at a glance whether he were pleased or disappointed, angry or in the sweetest of tempers; if Jo knew Guy as well as such opportunities had allowed him, and appreciated him, perhaps, more than he deserved to be appreciated, Nicholas had had even a better opportunity. For, consider, the Russian was hardly more than a boy, and had played boyish games with Guy in those old days before there was any thought of this dreadful war, before, indeed, the rascality of Ernst Blott in particular and of the German nation in general had been taken by either of them into serious consideration. As light-hearted boys they had played together. They had reached the age of adolescence side by side, and this Armageddon had drawn them willy-nilly into the furnace. Yes, indeed! These two, Guy and Nicholas, had long since been chums, each with so much respect for the other that they had never discussed the point, seldom, indeed, mentioned the excellences of one or other to their friends, and took it for granted that those who knew them knew thoroughly well that they were friends, the sort of friends who remain comrades through any and every adversity.

A Cruel Disappointment 315

Fast friends, then, were Guy and Nicholas, and had long since taken their friendship and good feeling for one another as natural. Was it, then, likely that Nicholas would desert his old chum any more readily than would the impetuous Jo, the little handy-man, trembling with desperation and eagerness at that very instant? Not likely!

"My hand upon it!" cried the Russian. "We will see Guy through this business yet! But——"

"Yes, but——"

"But" was all about them in the shape of a tent through which a man could cut his way with a puny pair of scissors, and which formed no alarming barrier. But outside there was, just as there was in the case of their comrade, a guard of Turkish soldiers, a sentry marching in front and behind the tent, alert, ready to fire his weapon and arouse the whole camp, while, in that camp itself, there was now perhaps the third of a Turkish division—a somewhat attenuated division, we should add—perhaps at that very moment 4000 men, perhaps fewer. But 4000 or 40 it mattered little, for the odds were enormously against Jo and Nicholas.

"But," said Jo, in deep, almost angry tones, scratching his head again and patting the little bald patch on the top, "it's got to be done! Don't 'but' me, Nicholas — Mr. Nicholas, beggin' yer pardon; don't 'but' me!"

316 The Armoured-car Scouts

The Russian might have demanded with much heat who was "butting" anyone, but, casting a glance at his friend, and being just able to distinguish his features, for the moonlight penetrated the canvas of the tent, he perceived that the sailor's face was twitching, while, had he been so dense as to fail to see that, plain to any observant man in spite of the semi-darkness, the voice of the sailor told its own tale with an emphasis there was no denying. For, indeed, this gallant little sailor, so cool, so calm, so nonchalant on other and often very trying occasions, was now worked up, had lost his placid manner, was shutting and opening his strong fingers, was breathing deeply in short, sharp gasps, and was looking about him like a hunted or caged tiger.

Nicholas placed a hand on his shoulder, in reassuring manner, and patted the sailor.

"Not I, Jo!" he said in sympathetic tones. "I'm not 'butting' you, no one's 'butting' you. Let's get to business. It don't look healthy, does it? this place in which we are imprisoned. Now, let's put our heads together. How can a fellow hope to break out? Supposing we were to cut a hole through the tent and jump on one of the sentries?"

"Can't be done! Go astern! Go astern!" said Jo. "It's as plain as a ship's cable that there 'ud be a ruction, the other sentries would fire, the camp would be alarmed and wakened, and there 'ud be a

thousand or more men rushing after us. Let's try again!"

"Yes, let's!"

But in spite of cudgelling their brains, in spite of peering from underneath the wing of their tent—just as Guy was doing almost at the precise moment—though, indeed, they made desperate attempts to come to some solution, the minutes passed and left them just as much in difficulty, in increasing despair, in fact, and impressed rather more firmly upon their minds the fact that the task they had set themselves was almost insuperable. Yet they were dogged fellows, those two; and the stake was of no small proportions. It was their liberty first—yet that was only a secondary matter—and Guy's life next, second in order, it is true, but first in importance without question.

"What's that?" demanded Jo, or rather, hardly whispered the question. "Mr. Nicholas, listen! Sentries changing! The guard ordering them about! Let's squint at them."

Once more they went to the bottom of the tent and peered out into the open—strangely enough, just as Guy had been doing—and watched the sentries posted, first the man in front of the tent relieved by a comrade, and then the man behind; and thereafter watched during several minutes as the sentries paced to and fro on their beat. Lying there, they heard in the far distance

bugles, the tramping of feet, and, later still, the music of a band, playing the last detachment of the moving portion of the division out of the camp; and, finally, just as silence seemed to have settled on the place again, and the attention of the sentries, distracted for a little while by the sounds of their comrades' departure, was again concentrated on their own particular task, other sounds broke the silence—the scrunch of wheels upon the road, and the patter, growing louder every moment, of a horse trotting.

Perhaps three minutes later there came into view first of all an officer, a big, angular, bony fellow, whose flowing moustaches could be seen now and again as the moonbeams played about them, and behind him a four-wheeled Turkish cart laden with baggage. Pulling up, this officer shouted for the sergeant of the guard in tones which instantly attracted attention.

“That villain!” gasped Nicholas. “Listen to his horrible accent! German! A German murdering the Turkish language is, I do believe, the very last thing in atrocities!”

“The German! That fellow Blott—Ernst Blott, I believe!” exclaimed Jo.

“That’s the man; late partner of Guy’s father—murderer! villain!”

“A deep-dyed rascal!” growled Jo. “Don’t tell me what he’s been before. It don’t matter to me

whether he was partner or anything else to Guy's father. What's it matter to us now what he's been in the past? All I care about is the remembrance that this fellow was the cause of all our trouble. If we don't break out of this place, he'll be the direct cause of the shooting of our comrade. Bah! Look at the scoundrel! And to think that he's beaten us so far, to think that he's beaten us so badly that we can't move, that we can't think how to act, that he's got us fixed so tightly that the hours get fewer and fewer and find us more helpless! If only I could get out and catch him by the neck!"

The cautious Nicholas caught the impulsive sailor by the arm and restrained him, for, indeed, Jo was almost maddened by the sight of the German, and might easily have lost all restraint, and, cutting his way through the canvas, have launched himself at Ernst Blott. But, cautioned by his comrade, he lay there and watched as the German pulled in his horse and dismounted.

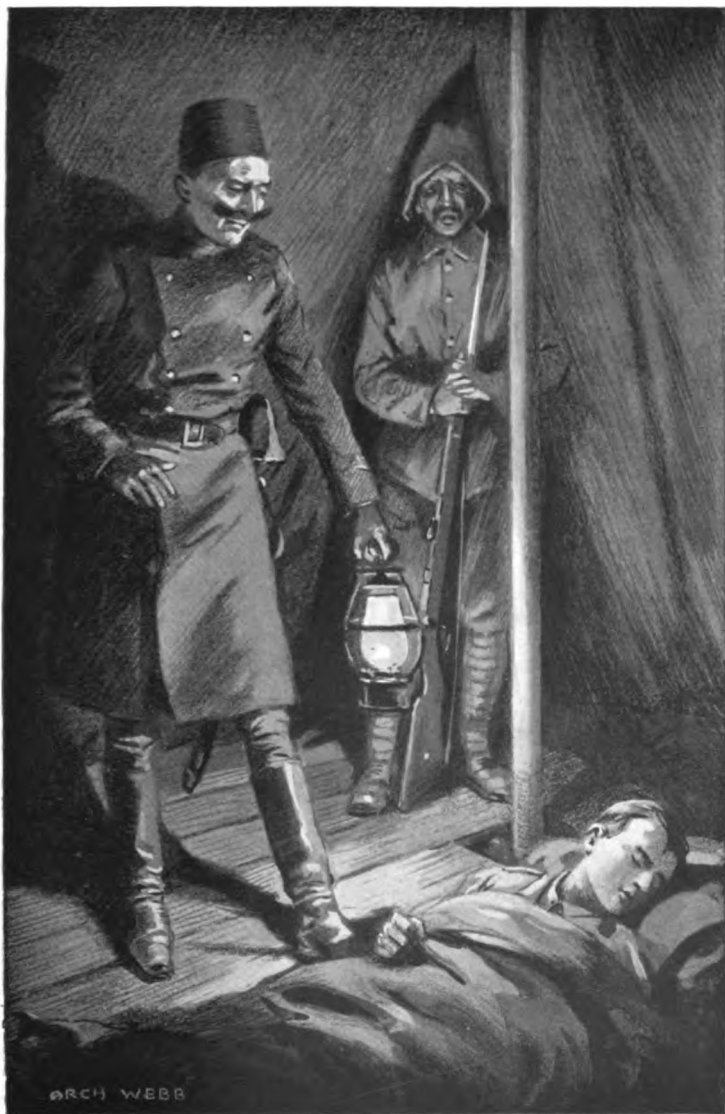
"Send a man here to hold my horse!" Ernst Blott commanded in tones which sent the sergeant running, and in such a peremptory manner that every man of the guard awakened and stood at attention, trembling, and wondering what would happen. "Now," said the German, when the man had taken his bridle, "now what of your prisoners? I'm making a round to see that all is secure before I leave the camp. The

remainder of the division will march at dawn, but not before the other fellow has been shot. Then, Sergeant, when you reach the new camp, you will report to me with your prisoners, while the sergeant of the guard watching the spy will report as to his death—how he died, whether he quavered, or whether he showed pluck. Open the tent and let's look at these rascals."

The rascals in question dived for their blankets, and when, a little later, the flap was pulled back, and the sergeant entered bearing a lantern, Ernst Blott, following him, saw only two huddled figures bundled in their blankets, apparently sleeping peacefully.

"So much for friendship!" he exclaimed, while a sneer crossed his face. "They sleep and dream pleasant dreams, while their comrade, I'll be bound, shivers. Well, let them sleep. Keep good watch over them, and do not fail to report on your arrival with the remainder of the division."

It was only a short ride to that other tent where Guy was lying, and, very much to the disappointment and anger indeed of this German, he discovered Guy apparently as blissfully ignorant of the situation as were those comrades of his. For here, again, a huddled, blanketed figure lay, seemingly fast asleep; and the spy, this unfortunate youth, denounced by the scoundrel Ernst Blott, lay, it appeared, dreaming, as careless of his coming fate as those others had seemed of the future. Ernst Blott sneered at the



C. 586

"ERNST BLOTT SNEERED AT THE FIGURE AND PUSHED THE
LANTERN FARTHER FORWARD."

A Cruel Disappointment 321

figure, seized the lantern and thrust it farther forward, and then, turning on his heel, pushed the sergeant aside and strolled out of the tent.

"He'll not trouble you much longer," he told him. "Set your sentries again. Take good care of the fellow!"

Mounting his horse once more, he went off along the road, retracing his steps and picking up the cart opposite the tent occupied by Nicholas and Jo. He then went on after the retiring Turkish division, the footfalls of his horse and the rumbling of the wheels growing fainter till they died away in the distance. And when he had gone, and no further sounds could be heard from the direction he had taken, the sergeants of both guards breathed more easily, the men lay down and soon fell asleep, while the sentry watching Guy's prison, who, at the very moment when the German had drawn near, had been advancing to ascertain the cause of the noise made, as he imagined, by the prisoner, had forgotten that incident, and was once more standing out there in the moon rays, dreaming his wonderful, romantic dreams, oblivious of his surroundings. As for Guy himself, we will hark back to him for but an instant.

The sudden coming of the German, the clatter of his horse as he drew nearer, had, as we have mentioned, coincided with those sounds he had been making with the object of attracting the sentry's at-

322 The Armoured-car Scouts

tention. A desperate scheme had entered his head, and he was about to put it into execution; but once more the German had intervened, and only just in time had our hero been able to delay his plans, to dive for his bed and wrap himself up in his remaining blankets. But now that Ernst Blott had gone again, now that the sentry was apparently oblivious of his surroundings and had forgotten all about those sounds which had disturbed him a little earlier, Guy once more crept to the opening, saw that the cords were cast loose, and again struck the canvas with his fingers till the sentry lifted his head, listened, and then paced towards the tent, bent this time on discovering the cause of the disturbance.

Nicholas and Jo listened, like the sergeants of the guard and their men, to the retreating steps of the German, and then, leaping from their beds, once more took up the important question of their immediate movements. There was a faint click as the sailor took something from his pocket and opened it.

"I have my knife here," he told the Russian, "and I'm going to wait no longer. It's now or never with us! And I'd rather chance a shot from the sentry than chance losing the opportunity of rescuing Guy. Are you for it too, Mr. Nicholas?"

"Certainly!" came the prompt answer. "But how? What shall we do?"

A Cruel Disappointment 323

"Do? Wait here a moment whilst I collect something I've thought of. Sit still where you are!"

Suddenly remembering that he had seen a number of small wooden buttons, some four inches long and perhaps an inch in diameter, buttons which would make excellent missiles if properly directed, and which were attached to cords on the inside of the tent, and were put there for the purpose of lifting the sides up and admitting air, Jo went round the place rapidly, cutting off these objects and pocketing them one after another.

"Now we slice open the tent at one end, where the sentry's hardly likely to see it, and shy these at one of 'em in the hope that he'll call the other. Meanwhile we've cut a hole at the opposite end—savvy? Got it? How's that?"

It was better than nothing, though not very brilliant, as Nicholas was forced to admit; but, when all was said and done, it was better than nothing—better than sitting there twiddling their thumbs as the minutes passed and the moment for Guy's execution drew nearer. It was better than sitting there fearing the future, fearing what might befall themselves; and in any case it offered what might turn out to be quite a rattling adventure.

"I'm with you!" cried Nicholas. "'In for a penny, in for a pound!' Hah! That's an old quotation that Guy taught me, and is English."

"British," Jo told him; "British, Mr. Nicholas! England's a small place, though in the most curious and pretentious manner she has spread herself over the world till it's ridiculous, really funny, to see her, just a mere dot, and her colonies and dependencies, splashed red all over the map, and so big and huge that one almost loses sight of old England—dear old England! And how the boys born in those colonies and dependencies have stuck to the old country! How they've come up to the line and 'toed' it since this trouble began! How they must have astonished the Huns and their Kaiser! We ain't any longer English, sir; we're British—part and parcel of the British Empire!"

He turned to face the Russian in the twilight existing in their tent, pressing one hand into his pocket and gripping the bundle of wooden buttons which he had cut adrift, while with the other he struck himself violently on the chest, pushed out that portion of his anatomy, tossed his head, and unconsciously looked what he was—a product of the very Empire of which he had been talking, an admirable example of the race which he had been praising. If it had not been that there was disaster ahead, and that the moments for serious business were passing, no doubt the cool-headed little fellow would have debated further upon this subject. For it was, indeed, a subject of peculiar fascination where the sailor was concerned, and one

which, in ordinary times, with his comrades all round him, he was apt to open on any and every occasion, till, had it not been that Jo was a prime favourite with all, he would have been voted almost a bore. Yet though we are bound to confess that this particular subject, referred to *ad nauseam*, sometimes irritated his fellows, it was still always a subject which claimed their attention if not their keen enthusiasm.

“You’re ready, then?” demanded Nicholas, bringing the sailor back to the task they had in hand. “Now, let’s repeat the orders you’ve given. First we go to the far end of the tent and slice a hole and pelt one of the sentries. That will require only one of us—I mean, of course, the pelting—for two might barge into one another, get confused, and be perceived by our guards. Then we go to the other end, cut our way out, and bolt for it.”

“Got it, Mr. Nicholas! That’s the ticket! Bolt for it! But, wait——”

“Stop! Bolt where?”

“I’m coming to that, let’s get the other part finished first. You said we might barge into one another—so we might. Now, I’m smaller than you are by a heap, so here’s the plan of action. I go to the top of the tent and do the pelting, while you go south, as it were, carve a hole at that end, and lie to at anchor, waiting for me to come alongside and join you, then we’ll up sail and make into the open.”

“And then?”

“And then,” repeated Jo—“then we strike direct for the other tent, keep a look-out for a bunch of guards such as are stationed outside our own, and then, when we are sure we’ve found the place, deal with that question. Don’t let’s worry how we are going to get to Mr. Guy. One trouble at a time! Let’s finish this little business first!”

Outside the tent the crescent of the moon, hanging placidly in the sky, gave the whole camp the most peaceful aspect, flooding the countryside with its gentle rays—so gentle, indeed, that the tents were little more than visible, and the figures grouped about those two in which Guy and his comrades were imprisoned hardly distinguishable, except to those who were seeking for them. The silence, the gentle light, the warm breath of air blowing across the place, seemed to have a soothing effect upon the Turks carrying out that midnight vigil. The sentries outside the tent in which the Russian and the little sailor were imprisoned lolled as they went this way and that, halted at the ends of their beats, sometimes as long as five minutes, and every now and again, satisfied that the sergeant of the guard was fast asleep, called in gentle tones to one another.

As in the case of that fellow outside Guy’s tent, one of the men here was half-dreaming, and seemed to find it impossible to finish the loud yawning, which a

A Cruel Disappointment 327

dozen times, perhaps, made the night hideous. Then his comrade, infected by the sound, followed suit, so that had there not been serious business afoot, and the life of a comrade in question, Jo and Nicholas would have been convulsed with laughter. For it was so funny to hear one of these Turks ground his rifle with a dull thud, grip it between his knees, and then watch him stretch his arms, throw his head backwards, and open his mouth in a yawn. So queer to know that of a certainty, within a few seconds, the fellow lolling on the other side of the tent, and perhaps out of range of his comrade, would halt also, and send forth sounds unmistakable, which told that he too was yawning.

Taken altogether, the noise they made, while it did not alarm the sergeant of the guard and their sleeping comrades, was propitious for the success of the enterprise which Jo had planned. It told of tired, weary fellows, of men who, perhaps, had been on duty during the whole hot day, and now longed for their couches, or, rather, for the floor and the blankets which formed the simple resting-place of the soldier.

Jo tapped Nicholas on the shoulder, took two or three of his wooden buttons into his left hand, and whispered in the Russian's ear:

"Couldn't be better! Just the sleepy time of night or early morning—don't know which it is though," he said; "but from the look of the moon I should say

about midnight, or a little after, and that's when men are most sleepy. Now, see me wake 'em up! And you get along to your quarters?"

For a brief moment they exchanged hand-grips, and then, parting, Jo stepped swiftly to the top of the tent, while the Russian crept to the opposite end and very swiftly cut a slit with his knife, which would allow the two of them to slip out without any difficulty. Just as he had finished he heard the merest, faintest noise from the other end, a queer, dull, half-tearing sound which was enough—which told him, in fact, that Jo had done likewise. Perhaps it was a minute later, though it felt almost a year, that he detected another sound, almost a cry, though suddenly smothered, and then a low summons. Thereafter there came to his ears the hurried tread of a sentry marching on the right hand of the tent—that nearest the centre of the camp—and once again a low sound, succeeded within an instant by a sharper one, as though a missile had struck someone. He almost jumped out of his skin as a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"That's got them!" Jo's voice was saying in his ear. "I hit the fellow plump in the face with the first one of my buttons, and that brought him up short. He looked first at the tent, for I was squinting at him from the opening, then he turned in the opposite direction, and just then I got him with another button

right between the shoulders. That brought him round with an exclamation, and just as I closed the opening the other fellow came hurrying up, asking him why he had called out, and what was the matter. Listen! You can hear them discussing the question. Come along! Now's the time! Out we go! Full steam ahead! And if we're challenged, go on without speaking, for we ought to be able to hide up in any odd corner."

They hurried through the opening in the tent like ghosts, and found themselves in broad moonlight—at least, those gentle beams, which gave barely sufficient light to see the road when one was upon it, appeared in those anxious moments to the two to be broad, staring moonlight, so broad that in their flustered condition they fancied that their figures must stand out brilliantly illuminated, visible to all who cared to look, or an easy mark if the sentries were to direct their rifles at them. Without stopping, fleeing across the grass which surrounded the tent, they soon reached another, and, diving behind that, kept on in a southerly direction till they gained the road.

"Now, stop!" said Jo. "No one can tell us from Turks now; that moon ain't half as bright as we imagined! It's only because we're worked up, as it were, that we think everybody can see us. No, Mr. Nicholas, we're just two good Turkish soldiers at this

330 The Armoured-car Scouts

blessed moment, and we'll stroll along the road till we catch sight of the guard watching the tent in which Mr. Guy is a prisoner. Then I suppose we'll have to have another council of war and decide how to fix his business."

That council of war, when the moment came to hold it, was a very simple affair. For, imagine the astonishment of the two when, having sighted that bundle of rugs beneath which the sergeant of the guard and his men slept, and so made sure of the tent in which Guy was incarcerated, they could see no sentry outside. And though they made a circuit of the whole place, peering at every corner and angle of the tent, still no Turkish soldier could be observed mounting guard over it.

"They must have tied Guy up," Jo whispered. "Well, we can cut him free. Come on, let's carve a hole in the back of the tent, go in, and finish the business."

Perhaps it was a minute later, perhaps a greater interval of time elapsed before these two impatient fellows had gained the back of the tent, and, having rested there a moment to make sure that no one had detected them, and that there was no one about to give the alarm, had cut a slit down through the canvas, which no doubt would rouse the Turkish quartermaster on the morrow to a state of fury, and entered. There was a figure lying on the blankets.

A Cruel Disappointment 331

"Guy!" exclaimed Jo, and the two kneeled beside the figure.

Something mumbled at them; they heard a voice which was decidedly smothered, and, running their hands over the figure, were amazed to find that both hands and legs were lashed together, a gag was in the mouth, and a bandage tied tightly round the head, almost smothering their comrade. But wait! What was strange about this bundled figure? What was it that caused Jo, who knew our hero so well, to suddenly give vent to a startled cry? What caused him to dive into one pocket and produce a match—one of the few which lay loose there, and which, like his knife, had not attracted the attention of their captors.

"Wait!" he said; "I'll strike a light. Stay there, Mr. Nicholas. Now watch. Who is this fellow? Not Guy, I'll be bound. I'm fairly bothered!"

Bothered he might well be; for as the match burst into flame, and the light illuminated the figure huddled there, both Jo and Nicholas saw, not their comrade, Guy, but a Turkish soldier, Turkish without doubt, for Jo made sure of that by tearing the bandage from his face and taking close stock of the fellow.

CHAPTER XVIII

Seeking in the Dark

ASTOUNDED, baffled, indignant—yes, thoroughly indignant—at the discovery he had just made, Jo lit another match, as though he could not yet believe his eyes and the glimpse he had obtained of that huddled figure on the blankets, which he was sure Guy had been occupying but a short while before. But could anyone in their usual senses make a mistake on this occasion?

“It’s—— Good heavens!—Why!—Lor’!” he heard Nicholas exclaim, and listened to his companion’s heavy breathing, gusty breathing indeed, while the little sailor himself was positively panting.

Indeed there was every excuse for some expression of astonishment and excitement, even of dismay, on the part of these two who had dared to ride behind the Turkish front, who had since been made prisoners, and had broken out of the tent in which they were incarcerated. That had been a triumph, a ticklish business safely got over, and once they were sure that they had escaped the attention of their guards

they had come on to this other tent where Guy had been made a prisoner—Guy Grammond, sentenced to death at dawn by shooting. Positively tingling, bubbling over with enthusiasm at the success which had so far resulted from their operations, they had arrived there, and now, when, after having scoured round the tent, spied about and made sure that there was no one there to interfere with them, they had at length cut their way into the interior and had discovered a figure which they naturally took to be that of their comrade, to learn, in the spluttering flash of light which that single match gave out, that they were mistaken, that it was not Guy at all, that this wretch—for wretch the fellow was as Jo instantly decided—was a Turk, an enemy, possibly one of the fellows told off to shoot Guy. Why, the thing was horrible!

As the seconds passed, and the full realization of this happening dawned upon Jo's active brain, the little fellow clenched both fists and gasped even louder.

"Give me a match. You had some in your pocket; give me some at once! Now, I'll stand well over it so that the light won't be reflected on the canvas. Who is the beggar? How's he tied up? What's it all mean? Good lor'! What on earth has happened?"

It was with a shaking hand that Jo held out the flickering match once he had got it ignited; no easy

matter, let us add, considering the condition of his nerves and the general high tension of the situation.

“Why, the fellow’s tied up with — with strips of blanket! There’s a ball of blanket pushed in between his teeth! He’s alive, too, sensible, is listening to what we’re saying. Have a care you! Have a care, you dog!” growled the usually soft-spoken Russian as he tore the gag from the man’s mouth and bent close over him. “Now, tell your tale. Who are you? How came you to be here? Where is that other—that prisoner who was placed here till the morning?”

Only the chattering of the man’s teeth answered him, while, despite the trembling of his own hands, Nicholas could easily detect that the whole frame of the fellow he was kneeling over was shaking as if the man were suffering from a fever.

“Speak!” he commanded again. “Tell the truth and nothing shall happen. Tell a lie——!”

There was an ominous click near at hand as Jo—that bloodthirsty little Jo, who in former times would not have destroyed a fly unnecessarily—opened the blade of his clasp-knife and bent a little closer, whereat the figure huddled upon the blanket bed shivered. For if Jo had said no word, that sound, the recognition that here were two enemies, conveyed to the Turk his meaning.

“I am harmless, helpless! As Allah watches over us—over you and over me—I have done no wrong to

your comrade!" the man at length managed to say, though it was as much as he could do to make his trembling lips frame the words. "How did I come here? How is it that I am lying tied up like a bundle? Listen! By Allah, I speak the truth!"

"Aye! Well it will be for you! Speak, then!" said Nicholas sternly.

"I was on sentry-go outside the tent, alone, expecting nothing from the prisoner, who appeared to be overwhelmed with fear."

"Overwhelmed with fear!" repeated Nicholas, and then swiftly translated the words to his companion.

"Overwhelmed with fear!" scoffed Jo, anger and bitterness in his voice. "I'll screw the fellow's head off if he dares to suggest again that Mr. Guy wasfunking."

"Overwhelmed by fear of the fate which so soon awaited him," went on the Turk, unaware of the storm he had so suddenly aroused in the sailor's breast. "But he was a clever youth, that prisoner! I see his ruse now clearly. For he cheated us, he fooled us, he made pretence of fear when, indeed, all the time he was scheming at an escape. We fed him, which quietened him down, and when that infidel arrived—that German officer—the fellow was asleep, peacefully asleep, as if he had no care for the morrow. So satisfied were we, that the sergeant himself turned in, leaving me to watch alone.

Nicholas sniffed, and then hurriedly explained the matter to Jo, who began to chuckle.

"Fooled 'em, did he? So he's got off out of this place! Just like him! But—" went on the sailor, "but he might have given us a word, don't you think, Mr. Nicholas? Just a word of warning! For, here we are, and now what's to happen?"

"Wait! Let the man finish! What then?" demanded Nicholas.

"What then, Excellency? Why, I, who stood outside dreaming, but half awake, longing for my bed, heard sounds within the tent, and, advancing to find out what was their cause, felt myself suddenly gripped and dragged into the place, and, in spite of my struggles, found myself tossed on these blankets, muzzled by cloth wound round my face, and then secured hand and foot by the same material. Before I quite knew what had happened I was alone, unable to call out, hardly able to move—trussed just like a fowl, as you found me."

"Which means something worse when an explanation is called for," said Nicholas, whereat the unfortunate wretch on whom Guy had served such a cunning trick began to tremble and shake again.

"Now what happens?" asked Jo. "A pretty kettle of fish this! Jumping out of one frying-pan clean into another! For here we are, in prison almost as much as we were in that other tent, only there aren't

guards around. Listen to that! What's that noise? Men shouting?"

They cocked their ears and listened, and presently were quite sure that shouts were coming from the distance. Even the Turk heard them now that he was unmuzzled, and if they could have seen his face they would have known that he was terribly frightened.

"It means that I shall take the place of the prisoner in the morning," he whimpered. "There will be no mercy for the man who allowed a spy to escape. Allah! Allah! What have I done to deserve this!"

"Time we moved away from here," said Nicholas abruptly. "Listen here, my friend! If you are a wise man you'll clear away from this camp as fast as your legs will take you. Come! We will cut you loose; see that you say no word about us. Is that a bargain then? Swear it by Allah!"

"I swear by Allah I will say not one single word! Set me free, Excellency, and I will run till I have neither breath nor strength left, and will hide away in some village."

"Cut him loose, then," said Nicholas, hurriedly telling Jo all that was passing. "There, my fine fellow, you are free! Out you go, and a good journey to you! Now, Jo, it's our turn! What a row they are kicking up yonder! Seems to me that they must have found out that we are absent. Good heavens! Supposing that Guy went off to find us just as we

have come here to discover him? It's just the sort of generous thing he would attempt."

"Just!" agreed Jo readily. "Just the sort of crack-brained, idiotic, mad prank he would play. I know him! I know that fellow! And when I meet him I'll tell him something interesting. But—well, yes, Mr. Nicholas, we've got to meet him yet; and what are we to do, you ask? Why, follow our noses! Get out of here, turn in the direction of the Russian troops, and trust our luck and the darkness."

Following one's nose may sound an extremely simple manœuvre, and, no doubt, under ordinary circumstances and conditions the problem of carrying out Jo's prescription would have been quite a simple affair and one which would not have taxed either his own or Nicholas's energies to any extent. But now the mere following of one's nose was quite a complicated matter. For one might turn to the north, to the south, to the east, or to the west when once outside the tent, and enemies abounded in any and every direction. Let them start up the length of the camp, between the tents in which they had been incarcerated, and Turks were there—swarming about the place—asleep but a few minutes before, but now out of their tents, exclaiming, shouting, wondering what had alarmed and disturbed them, ignorant of the exact conditions. And supposing they ran off instead to the right, directly towards the south, there were

enemies still—plenty of them, just as there were in those other directions. It is not, therefore, a surprising fact that we chronicle when we relate that Jo and Nicholas stood outside that tent wondering what to do and in which direction to turn. The presence, however, of the guards posted to watch over the condemned prisoner influenced their movements wonderfully. They had forgotten them until that very moment, and now, hearing voices near at hand, and the click of accoutrements, they peered round the edge of the tent and saw perhaps a dozen figures standing there, one big man—the sergeant—at their head, all irresolute, all listening to those distant sounds, wondering, like their comrades yonder, what had happened, their thoughts distracted from the tent which they guarded by the certainty that something serious had occurred to their comrades.

“This way!” said Jo, gripping the Russian by the sleeve and turning away, so as to keep the tent between himself and the guard. “Let’s trek straight over here till we are well out of sight. It’s dark now, darker than it was before, for the moon is declining, and when we’ve gone perhaps a hundred yards they’ll not see us. After that we’re Turks again, ain’t we?”

“Turks? Yes! Certainly! Rather! Go on, I’m following.”

Trusting implicitly to the sailor, Nicholas bade

340 The Armoured-car Scouts

him lead on, and followed closely behind him, keeping a careful watch in every direction. Jo himself stumbled forward as if blindly, following his nose literally, hardly caring which way he went, wondering all the while what to do, raging furiously now at the trick which Guy had played him and muttering savagely beneath his breath.

“Of all the idiotic games to play!” he growled as he stumbled along. “Talk of cricket! This ain’t it, not by a long way! Wait till I get hold of that chap Guy Grammond, and see if I don’t tell him something! Aye, and do something to him that’ll make him sit upright. A darn dirty game I call it!”

“What’s that? What are you talking about?” demanded Nicholas, suddenly putting a restraining hand on his shoulder and bringing him to a stop, while he himself first stared at his companion, whose face was clearly to be seen under the pale moonbeams, and then peered round a little anxiously as if he thought that Jo must have seen something which threatened their safety.

“What am I saying?” exploded Jo, who, indeed, during the last few minutes had been working himself up into a fine little hurricane, and now, no longer able to repress his disappointment, began to fire off a broadside of big guns and small guns, torpedoes, and every sort of missile at his companion. “Did I speak?” he asked sarcastically. “See you here,

Mr. Nicholas, you've known this fellow, Guy Grammond, for a long time—eh? Well, I'll tell you now what I couldn't say back there in the tent for fear of the guard. Out here we seem to be clear away from everyone, and a man can speak his mind—it was a darn dirty game, that there trick he played on us!"

"What trick?" demanded Nicholas, a little flabbergasted.

"Trick!" cried Jo indignantly, well knowing all the time that he was acting stupidly, childishly, yet stamping with wrath, and with disappointment far more than with wrath. And now, still more childishly perhaps, he seized upon the opportunity of transferring his anger from our hero, who might be anywhere, and certainly was not within hearing, to Nicholas, who was within easy ear-shot. "Listen here!" he growled, almost hissed. "You'll be taking his part soon, you will, Mr. Nicholas. What I wants to know is this: What's he want to drag us out of our comfortable prison for anyway? Wasn't we comfortable there—eh? Who's goin' to tell me that we wasn't? What's he want, this 'ere Guy Grammond, to lure us away from that comfortable, safe spot down here, only to find a Turk tied up like a sack, a sort of monkey in a bag, a shivering reptile? Is that playing the game squarely?"

Nicholas stared at the sailor dumbfounded, his face flushing with rising indignation and wrath. For

surely this was not the time for either of them to criticize the action of Guy; and, in any case, who could blame that young fellow for "slipping his cable"—to use one of Jo's favourite metaphors—and clearing off? Who could squabble with him if, knowing the fate in store for him in the early morning, he took matters into his own somewhat capable hands and broke away from his captors? Not Jo, certainly!

"Why," he began, about to reply in tones which would have told of his anger, then suddenly stopped—stopped and stared at Jo—and clapping a hand on each of his broad shoulders, first smiled at him, and then, opening his mouth, roared with laughter, or rather, didn't roar, remembering the need there was for silence, but for all that allowed his handsome features to be convulsed by a laugh which in former times would have been accompanied by sounds of hilarious merriment.

That staggered Jo. That brought the little sailor's indignation to boiling-point again, and, unconsciously, both his fists were doubled, while he became at once cold, distant, dangerous, his eyes glinting in the moonlight. In frigid, polite tones he started to interrogate the Russian. But Nicholas merely laughed again, thumped him on the shoulders, shook the little fellow, and then, moving his face still closer, stood grinning.

"Why, Jo, my boy, I can see it all! See the reason

for this fit of grouching! You're disappointed—eh? You thought you were going to be the one to rescue our comrade? That's it! You and I—and mostly you—were going to cut his bonds asunder and deliver him from the Turks. And he's been one too many for us—two too many I should call it; he's beaten us hollow! And I wouldn't mind wagering something quite valuable that, at this very moment, he's scheming to rescue us, imagining that we are the helpless ones and in need of assistance."

It was true enough, uncannily true, if only the two could have seen Guy at that moment, or could have understood the cause of the din and disturbance they had heard in the direction of the prison they had so lately occupied. Jo, honest fellow that he was, knew in his heart of hearts at once that Nicholas was telling him only the facts—unpalatable facts perhaps, yet facts nevertheless; and, moreover, facts which redounded to the discredit of no one, and in particular to the credit of Guy Grammond.

"Sink me!" he cried, and then sank his voice as Nicholas lifted a warning finger. "S'welp me! If that there young shaver ain't got us beat! You're right, Mr. Nicholas! Bust me if you ain't dropped right on the spot! And I'll admit right away that this 'ere temper's due only to disappointment. And to think that he's just stolen a march on us! To think that we two, struggling, as you might say, to stretch

out a helping hand, 'as come too late, and 'as turned up only in time to discover that this 'ere Guy don't want no help, and, far from wanting it, was thinking with pity of us two, and, as you've said, is perhaps at this very moment working round to lay his ship alongside us, as you might express it, and send aboard us so as to give us help."

It was Jo's turn to see the funny side of things—though, to be sure, it had taken quite a little time—and now, bending with a hand on each thigh, he ran both his hands down to the knees, up and down, up and down, while he doubled up in silent mirth. It was a great joke—so the little sailor thought—and he enjoyed it to the full, and would, indeed, have made a great deal more of it had it not been for Nicholas and for present circumstances. A hand dropped heavily on his shoulder.

"Hush! Hush!" said the Russian. "I can see men yonder, and there's a racket going on where we were imprisoned. I'll wager that Guy is up there! Let's make tracks."

Striking north, and passing now and again amongst tents which had accommodated a portion of the division which had recently left the camp, and which had been left standing, and were to be struck and brought on by a working-party left behind for that purpose, it was not long before the two approached the spot from which they had made their own escape perhaps an

hour earlier, the spot, too, from which that din and racket had come so soon after they had gained the tent in which they had expected to find Guy, and had been disappointed. But by now the sounds had died down, though, grovelling into an empty tent, and peering out in that direction, the two made out a number of men marching hither and thither, others examining the walls of the tent, whilst others still were trudging off into the distance, their figures at first faintly visible, then becoming more ghost-like, and, strangely enough, growing gradually, till, ere their outline vanished altogether, those were giant ghosts which moved away from the vision of Jo and Nicholas. But of Guy himself there was not so much as a shadow; not one of those ghost-like figures could be conjured into the solid reality resembling that young fellow; and, besides, they were Turks without doubt, just as was the Turkish soldier at that very moment walking towards them.

“Where’s he coming? What’s he want? Inquisitive—eh?” demanded Jo, noticing that this soldier—one of those, no doubt, employed in the search for the prisoner—was coming direct for the tent which sheltered them. “Supposing he comes in?”

There was silence, for the question raised a somewhat knotty problem. If this soldier actually entered the place, why then they would be discovered, and, if they threw themselves upon him, the clatter of a

struggle so near at hand might easily be expected to alarm the Turks in the immediate neighbourhood.

"Of course we go for him," said Nicholas. "Got a knife! Course you have! Draw it, then!"

"See you 'ere," whispered Jo, "no need for knives when I'm round. I've a fist here that's well-nigh knocked the head of a man off before this, and, if I hit that Turk, why, it'll be just as though a horse had kicked him. He'll wake up, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps next week, and in the meanwhile he'll be silent."

Stretched flat on the ground, with fingers gripping under the tent valance, the two kept their eyes rigidly on the Turk then approaching—a suspicious Turk, as they were bound to admit, a fellow who peered this way and that, observing everything, it seemed, who now and again lowered the tip of his fixed bayonet and prodded tufts of grass which seemed to attract his attention, and who, when hailed from the central tent, where Nicholas and Jo had been imprisoned, turned and answered coarsely, impatiently, telling the sergeant of the guard that he was wide awake, was searching carefully, and did not require the constant advice shouted at him. Presently the fellow was within ten yards of the tent, his face lit up partially by the moonbeams, though his helmet cast a deep shadow over the eyes and the upper part of his features. He turned away to the right, whereat Jo, just then getting to his toes and the tips of his fingers—preparing,

indeed, to leap towards the door and there make ready—relaxed and lay flat again. But the Turk seemed to have been attracted by this particular tent, or perhaps he knew that it was an empty one, or imagined that it was just the sort of place where escaping prisoners would take shelter. Whatever the reason, he turned abruptly and stared at it, and then, approaching nearer, and within perhaps a yard of the tent-pegs, turned abruptly again and looked out, as if contemplating every yard of the space before him. So still and silent was he, so preoccupied, in fact, that he presented a wonderful opportunity to the two men watching him from underneath the valance.

“A chap could easily lay him out,” Jo growled. “What say? Shall I creep out and give him one behind the ear that will send him floundering? What say, Nicholas?”

The sailor was fumbling then with his fingers at the foot of the valance, and was throwing off the rope-clips which held to the pegs which kept the canvas close to the ground, so that in a moment it would be loose, and could be easily lifted. For undoubtedly if this Turk was a danger to them, was inclined to be inquisitive, and might presently be expected to enter the tent in which they were hiding, here was the chance to allow Jo to make sure of their position. Better still, the man had moved now to a spot where the tent cast a deep shadow upon him, all but his

shoulders and his head, which stood out, as it were, from the shadow, brilliantly illuminated, though it must be remembered it was only the back of the head which was presented to Jo and Nicholas.

And then, ere Jo could carry out his intentions, and while Nicholas still hesitated, hopeful that the man would clear off and leave them alone, the soldier turned, gripped one of the ropes and shook it, and, turning once more and peering out into the open, swung round again and slowly, stealthily, crept along under the ropes towards the door of the tent, as if his suspicions had now become strengthened and he was certain that the fugitives were inside, and that he would surprise them. Jo got to the tips of his fingers and toes at once, raised himself on to his feet, and, stiffening all over, was moving off towards the door, when Nicholas gripped him by the arm.

“You idiot! Can't you see? Let me warn him!”

“Warn him! Warn him!” Jo demanded beneath his breath, and, if it had been light enough there in the tent, would have peered into Nicholas's face, to see whether the Russian had taken leave of his senses.

As it was, he endeavoured to throw off his grip and to make for the door, so as to be ready for the intruder. But Nicholas was too quick for him, and, holding him tight, raised his voice ever so gently.

“Guy! Guy!” he called; “we're in here—the two

of us—Jo and Nicholas! I spotted you only an instant ago! Come in, we're waiting for you."

The head, with its overshadowing helmet alone visible just then, was jerked backwards, and the figure sneaking along so ghostlike beside the tent, evidently with the intention of entering the place, halted abruptly, while the man threw out a hand and grabbed one of the ropes, causing the whole tent to shake. Jo stared! Nicholas stared! The man outside, whose features were shadowed by his helmet, stared also—positively gaped—whilst a deadly silence supervened for some few tense moments, during which the little sailor's fingers closed round the wrist of the Russian like a steel vice. Then the man outside bent forward, strode towards the opening of the tent, and came in without having opened his lips to speak to them, without a sound, without even showing any signs, other than the tossing back of his head and that abrupt halt, of his astonishment.

Was it after all Guy? Or had Nicholas in his impetuosity made some ghastly error? Had he, in fact, by calling to this stranger slinking about the camp, brought upon himself and his comrade a further danger? In short, and to repeat the question, had not the moonbeams played a trick with him, and caused him to bring upon the spot a Turk, one of their late guards, who would most certainly betray them?

350 The Armoured-car Scouts

No wonder, then, that Jo's fingers gripped his arm, and the little sailor's muscles grew as tense as steel bands as he made ready to spring upon this stranger. It was indeed a thrilling moment, when many a man would have given much to hear the voice of a comrade; but it was unrelieved by a sound other than the gentle footfalls of the Turk and the swishing of the canvas as he pushed the door aside. Was it Guy? Was this tall figure now barely visible within the tent their old comrade? Or was he an enemy about to fall upon them?

CHAPTER XIX

A Naval Land Battle

WITHOUT sound other than the gentle hum of their engines, without a word passing between the crew aboard each car, save for an occasional order from the officer or petty-officer in command, with scarce a movement of the drivers, beyond what was necessary to keep the engine accelerated and to steer each vehicle, that detachment of armoured cars manned by those gallant handy-men, comrades of Guy and Nicholas and Jo, bore down in the moonlight upon the Turkish camp, bore down at a steady pace which would bring them to the camp as the light grew stronger.

“Halt! Halt! Halt!”

The Commander aboard the leading car merely tapped the phlegmatic driver upon the shoulder and gave the order, and at once, obedient to the pressure upon the pedal, the huge ungainly-looking, yet beautifully-balanced and smoothly-running vehicle slowed down and came to an abrupt stop without so much as a squeal of its well-adjusted brakes, and without even a jar, thanks to its perfect mechanism. Behind it,

ten yards only away, the second vehicle halted, and so the armoured cars were strung out along the road, their engines purring almost inaudibly, their crews still silent, practically invisible, though now and again the moonbeams played upon eager pairs of eyes peering through a slit, through an open steel doorway, or through an observation-port in some other part—eager eyes, which watched for the dawn and for the first sight of the enemy.

“Just 1.30 a.m.! Moon sinking! It will be dark—as dark as pitch—in an hour and a half, and the dawn will come within another hour. That means that two and a half hours from now it will be light enough to engage the enemy. Now, Mustapha, how much farther?”

That cosmopolitan individual, that Turk who was no Turk, that Armenian who yet boasted of Kurdish blood, and had something of Russian about him, the fellow who boasted of no particular nationality, of no single city, and of no especial habitation, merely jerked his head till the moonbeams played about his flashing eyes and upon the hooked nose which separated them.

“Is it far, my master? These Turks—these barbarians—are they yet far beyond us? Wait! It is 1.30, you have said, and the moon is falling. Then listen to this suggestion. Dash on! Spur on! Let your engines roar while the light lasts! For now a

man can trace the road with ease, and there is no danger; but in half an hour, perhaps, driving without lights and without the moon will be out of the question. Then halt you must. Halt, then, my master, take food, let the men smoke and rest—though they must keep silent—and stop your engines. But, as the dawn comes up, start once more, for you will be on the threshold of the camp, and, to carry out your purpose, must push forward and take the enemy by surprise. Master, how I hate the Turk! He has massacred my poor Armenian brothers!”

The Commander merely answered with a lift of his eyebrows and with a half-suppressed smile.

“Armenian brothers—eh, Mustapha?” he said. “So you’re Armenian—eh?”

“Yes and no, Master. I have friends, relatives even, amongst the Armenians, just as I have amongst the Turks, and even amongst the Russians. But these Armenians, these poor helpless wretches, who could fail to favour them? Who could wish them worse than has already befallen them at the hands of the Sultan’s people? Bah! I could tell tales of massacres, my master, massacres organized hundreds of miles from here—mayhap in Berlin itself. But there, it is time to be moving forward.”

The Commander nodded violently. It was time to be moving forward. Every man within ear-shot of Mustapha nodded likewise.

354 The Armoured-car Scouts

"Blimy! As if we wanted to stay here!" growled one.

"Sink me! Ain't our job to go forward?" whispered another.

"'E's the lad, this 'ere Commander, 'e's the boy to do it!" growled a third, in a tone of voice which gave the impression that he had some grievance.

"'E's the boy, this 'ere Commander, and, come two hours and a bit, you'll see there'll be a dust-up, and we'll be there in the thick of it!"

"Go ahead!" cried the Commander, as if he had heard no sound. "Go ahead!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" repeated the driver, who all this while had hardly stirred, and who still kept his eyes on the road, peering forward.

Now there was just the faintest click as he pushed his gear lever home, the clutch engaged with a smoothness which was remarkable considering the weight of the armoured car, and a moment later they were off. "Go ahead!" could be heard from the car behind, and "Go ahead!" echoing from the next in rear. Two minutes later, in fact, the whole detachment was in motion again, sweeping along this smooth Turkish road at a pace which raised clouds of dust and rapidly took the cars within striking distance of that valley which harboured what was left of the Turkish division that had captured Guy and his comrades.

Perhaps it was twenty minutes later that the moon, sinking all this time, failed to provide sufficient light to enable the cars to proceed in safety, and once more the order was given to stop, and presently the detachment was halted. There, indeed, it remained as darkness flooded the land and the moon sank out of sight; and there it stood, formidable, grey, ghostly, and deadly silent as the dawn came up in the east, as the first rays of the rising sun splashed the inky-black sky, kindled it ever so gently, swept the inky blackness aside in one part and replaced it with a pinkish glow, which grew and grew, expanding in all directions, and deepening in colour and in brilliancy till at last the whole sky was aflame. The dawn had come! And with it the engines of those armoured cars, stolid and silent and motionless during the darkness which had followed the falling of the moon, stirred to life again; steel doors giving access to the interior of the cars clanged as the crews entered and closed them. Port-holes were narrowed again, embrasures cleared, and from a dozen points perhaps, from the turrets, from the sides, and from the front and back of each car, eager eyes looked out, the eyes of those handy-men who had made such a reputation for themselves in Russia and with the armies of Muscovy.

“Forward! Push on! Go steadily!” commanded the gallant sailor in charge of that detachment.

356 The Armoured-car Scouts

And forward the cars went, slowly this time, as if looking out for some opportunity, nosing their way into the dawn and into the uncertain future.

It was broad daylight when the cars reached the entrance to the valley, and the direct rays of the rising sun were slanting over the adjacent foot-hills and flooding the valley as the detachment actually entered it. Yet not a shot greeted them! Not a sound was heard! No man challenged their coming from the distant camp, from that collection of tents now clearly visible.

“Open out! Form line ahead!”

And at the command, as if these armoured cars were land-ships—as indeed they might easily be termed—the detachment changed its formation, the first car slowing down, whilst those in rear accelerated their engines and pushed forward on the left, forming a line, much as that line had been formed during that first exciting reconnaissance in which Guy had taken part. The line stretched over perhaps three hundred yards, with the Commander's car on the right, and a wide gap between each two of the vehicles then careering steadily across the valley, here smooth and almost bereft of grass, thanks to the marching of many a Turkish division. The detachment pushed on steadily towards the camp, and presently was sighted. A man in the distance shouted, a sentry fired his rifle, and then figures could be seen dash-

ing from tents, and an excited crowd collected at the nearest point and stared out into the open at what must have appeared to them, in those early hours, as an apparition.

But the fame of the British naval armoured-car detachment had gone broadcast through Lower Armenia and Asiatic Turkey, just as it had already captured the fancy of the Russian people, and roused the ire, not to mention the hate, of the Germans on the Russian front. These Turks, those who remained of the division so recently camped in this valley, had heard of these monstrous steel-clad wagons, had discussed them with some animation over their camp-fires, and, never having seen them nor experienced their prowess, had in many a case scoffed at them, belittled them, showered contempt on the Kurds, those wild and gallant horsemen who had had a brush with these strange enemies.

Indeed, looking out there across the camp in these early hours of the day which was to have seen Guy executed, not one single Turk, seeing those armoured cars lumbering across the ground, could take fright at them; they looked so harmless, so helpless, so unlovely and unwieldy. Pshaw! What danger was to be expected from such machines, which, to all appearances, carried no guns, were mere steel boxes on wheels, incapable of doing damage? Yet there were men in the camp who knew better—Turkish officers

358 The Armoured-car Scouts

—and presently bugles were blaring, whistles were sounding, and men were being lined up in readiness to meet the danger.

A Turkish battalion doubled out from the tents into the open, and threw itself down at the orders of its commander. Another battalion, forming up amongst the tents, marched off swiftly towards the entrance to the valley, with the evident intention of closing the gap, and so the line of retreat of the British. Meanwhile, other soldiers—the details of the camp, the tag-rag and bobtail of this Turkish division—men left to level the canvas, pack it, and bring it along to the new camping-ground — were “falling-in” now in almost any sort of order, and were made ready to reinforce that battalion in the open.

“Now the band plays!” grinned one of the handy-men aboard the Commander’s car. “Decks is all clear for action, and in a moment or so we’ll engage! Boarding-parties make ready!”

A splutter of musketry-fire burst from the Turkish battalion in the open, and spurts of dust blew up here and there about the cars, while one missile struck the side of one of the vehicles and set the steel ringing.

“Bull’s-eye!” growled one of the sailors.

“Outer!” laughed another, as a bullet struck the edge of the turret in which the machine-gun he commanded was mounted, and, ricochetting from it, went screaming off skywards.

“Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!” Some eager Turks had doubled forward with a machine-gun, had placed it behind a slight hillock, and, with that to cover them, had now turned their muzzle on the advancing cars and sent bullets spluttering along the line, now rattling on the steel carcasses, then swishing between them and throwing up spurts of dust far behind, and again centring on some car and setting its steel cuticle ringing loudly. Yet the cars pushed on without a pause, without appearing to notice the enemy, without a sound save for the gentle hum of their engines, without returning a single shot, as if blind to the danger before them and contemptuous of it.

“Steady! Slow down!”

The Commander, with his eyes glued upon the enemy, shifting now to the right, now to the left, and watching every movement, barely whispered the words, but, bending forward, tapped the driver on the shoulder; and that extraordinarily impassive individual, who, to look at him, might have been driving at that moment to some picnic or gala performance, or even, to carry the comparison a little further, might have been on his dismal way to some funeral, so immobile were his features, so sad, in fact, seen in repose—and, as an actual fact, they were in repose at this moment—merely pressed his brake pedal, took his foot from the accelerator, at once causing the huge car, grey-blue in colour, dull and uninviting

in appearance, yet a huge attraction to any mechanic, to slow down imperceptibly. And as it did so those lumbering vehicles on its left did likewise. Lumbering, we have said, yet when one glanced at them, when one knew of what speed they were capable, when one had watched the handy-men steering them hither and thither, handling them like ships at sea, putting their helm up or down, as the case might be, and making a course—to adopt some nautical expressions—in any and every direction, the most critical would hardly venture to use the term lumbering at all, but would call these curious vehicles the essence and poetry of motion.

“Ah! Just you watch them blighters! Oh, ain’t this goin’ to be a beanfeast?” observed the handy-man in charge of the machine-gun projecting from the front of the turret, merely turning his quid of tobacco from one side of his cheek to the other, and then twisting his eyes upwards.

Whereat his mate giggled. Elsewhere other members of the crew watched, some breathlessly, others with coolness and impassiveness equal to that of the driver, though the majority jerked remarks at one another *sotto voce*, and jerked them still more eagerly when the Commander, having peered through his glasses through the slit in the steel armour in front of him, knitted his brows, pushed the peak of his cap a little backward, and then again leaned forward.

"Ah, summat's coming! Bet you, he'll lay us aboard them Turks! He always was a boy for close-quarter fighting! Bizz! My aunt! That's something new in the programme."

"That" happened to be the sudden whine of a shell, heard above the purr of the engines, and the bursting of the missile some fifty yards in front of the line the cars had now taken up—a burst which spluttered shrapnel over the ground and beat a cloud of dust into motion. Then came the report from the distant gun, followed by the song of another shell, of a third, of a fourth, and of a fifth, proving that a battery still remaining with this portion of the division had got with commendable rapidity into action. At the same moment, too, the machine-gun, which the Turks had brought into the open, was rushed away to one flank, and the men could be seen scrambling with it. Then they disappeared into a trench, a practice-trench used for instructional purposes. And as the second salvo of shells came over, bursting above the cars, rattling shrapnel on their steel sides, and blowing clouds of dust all about them, the machine-gun got into action again and rattled and swept bullets at the invaders.

Yet not a gun spoke back from the cars. The things might have been abandoned for all the Turks knew, for they were now standing motionless, and there was not a sign of the crews. But a careful

watcher might have seen that the turrets above each armoured car were revolving slowly, and if only that steel cuticle had not been there to hide them, to protect the handy-men, the sailors would have been seen, their eyes glued to their sights, their hands gripping the handles, mates standing by to guide the cartridge belts through breech-locks, or hanging over spare munition chests ready to pile in replacements.

“Warm!” ventured the Commander, as if he were thinking aloud, as a well-placed shell struck the ground twenty yards to his left, between his own armoured car and the second in the line, and, bursting perhaps a foot beneath the surface, sent a cascade of dirt and gravel and stones swirling through the air.

“Warm!” growled the gunner behind him, dashing the sweat from his forehead.

“Sink me! ‘Warm’ did he call it?” muttered his mate, casting an eye to the left, where this last commotion had arisen, and then swiftly turning his eyes on the enemy in front.

But that extraordinary driver never moved a muscle, hardly seemed to wink so much as an eyelid, merely kept his gaze riveted through the slot before him upon that Turkish battalion now scattered in open order, and sending bullets from their rifles at him. Wait, though! He did move at last, this curious sample of a driver, this wonderfully calm personage. He bent forward, stared at the bonnet of his car, changed

colour just a little, and spat an order at the mechanic beside him.

“Those front doors—you closed ‘em?” he asked. “You’ve pulled ‘em to to protect our radiator? Why, of all the idiots!”

The man addressed, as cool and calm an individual as the driver himself, started, flushed, looked very guilty, and at once gripped and pulled at a lever, blaming himself as he did so, though, to be sure, his neglect to take this precaution was not so wonderful. In the excitement of the moment, vastly interested in what was occurring, he had forgotten the need for further protection, and perhaps the reminder the driver had given him, and the operation he had now carried out, had only just come in time. For that Turkish machine-gun swept the line of armoured cars as if it were a hose squirting water on them, only the dribblets of water were in this case nickel-covered bullets, which glinted and thudded and crashed against the steel lining of the car, which searched for any and every opening, which were split asunder as they collided with the edges of the plates, and sent fine strips of nickel and pellets of lead broadcast, even into the interior of the car.

“Forward! Forward!” commanded the officer.

“Forward!” repeated the man in charge of the machine-gun in the turret, as though unable to prevent himself from doing so.

364 The Armoured-car Scouts

“Forward!” that imperturbable driver muttered as he slid his first gear into place and let in his clutch. But, bless you, even then the man wasn’t flurried, for the clutch went in as smoothly as it was wont to do, the toe on the accelerator pedal depressed that lever with a refinement for which the man was known, and the big, heavy car got into motion as if someone—some giant—had gripped it at the back and had pushed it forward with irresistible power, but so gently applied that those on board were hardly aware of his action.

“Open fire! Numbers two, three, and four cars,” shouted the Commander, and the order was passed immediately along the line.

Then he blew a whistle, and at the sound, even before the rattle of the machine-guns was heard, the cars on the farthest flank detached themselves from the line, and that farthest on the left, speeding up and bumping across the rough piece of ground that happened to be there, nosed its way directly for that trench in which the Turkish machine-gun party had taken cover. Yes, it was a lumbering, ungainly looking vehicle, to be sure, moving across that rough place, its springs rebounding, its pneumatic-tyred wheels bumping and bouncing, directing itself, it seemed, for all one could see of its crew. It seemed to be able to smell out those Turks, and it never once wavered, not even when a shell—a lucky shell,

one must admit—burst right above it. It simply gave itself a shake, as it were, got rid of the bullets which had peppered its skin from front to back, and then went on with redoubled speed in silence, merely its engine purring, its commander cool and collected, and bent on serious business.

"You'll not waste ammunition here!" he told the gunner in the turret behind him, severely, casting a glance back at him, almost a threatening glance. "That gun's out of sight, and well placed. I'm going to enfilade it. Bear up a little to your left," he directed the driver curtly.

"Bear up a little it is, sir," the man answered.

"And slow down when we get in line with the trench. See that you don't shove us into it, for it may cut right across our front."

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the answer.

The scattering of the armoured cars of the detachment, its breaking up into more or less separate units, had at once an effect upon the enemy, who up to that moment seemed to have had the best of the action. That they were making hits those gunners were sure, for their shells could be seen plunging into the ground all about the armoured cars, or bursting well above them, but now, as the line broke and the cars went off in various directions, the aim of the Turkish gunners was thoroughly put out, much to the annoyance of a German non-commissioned officer in com-

mand of them. He stamped, and swore, and bullied his men, but without effect. For now the shells dropped behind, or far in front, or far beyond the objects they were aimed at.

But it was that Turkish battalion which was most disconcerted. To the men it had appeared, as they doubled over the open ground and opened fire with their rifles, that they had these insolent and adventurous vehicles at their mercy. Every man was a good enough shot to hit any one of the cars every time he pulled his trigger, and white splotches bursting on the cuticles of the cars told them that they were making good practice. But—and it was a big but now—their bullets failed to stop these brutes. They were coming on, those four in the centre, widening the intervals between them just a little, bouncing down upon that battalion, but still in silence, still without firing a shot, still as if bent upon suicide.

As for the car on the right, no doubt containing the officer commanding this insolent party of British sailors, the thing seemed to have gone entirely mad. For it separated from its companions, and, trundling across the open, made direct for the tented camp. But there was method in its madness—method in the madness, if you will, of that gallant Commander.

“See that you don’t get mixed up with tent ropes and pegs. There will be a road through the camp,” he told his driver; “shove along it. I’m looking out

for that battery. You men give a shout if you can spot it."

It was only a little later that one of the lusty fellows bawled in the ear of the Commander, and, pushing a hand through the slit in the turret, directed his attention to the right.

"Over there to starboard, sir!" he bellowed. "I seed 'em a moment ago—five of 'em close together and all in action."

"Bear up to your right! Take that road running through the tents. Machine-guns get into action whenever you have an opportunity! We can't capture guns, lads, but we can scupper the crews and maybe damage the weapons."

Did the eyes of that imperturbable driver flicker? Did the merest flush of red rise to his somewhat pallid cheeks, and did his chest heave ever so slightly, and his nostrils gape just a trifle as he imbibed a rather deeper breath? In fact, was that handy-man guilty of the weakness, at this supreme moment, of losing his impassiveness? of even coming perilously near to giving a startled gasp? If so, all signs of even the smallest emotion were gone in a second.

"Aye, aye!" he piped. "Aye, aye, sir!" and swinging his wheel, and slipping his clutch for a moment, he rushed the huge, lumbering, swaying, yet beautifully-sprung car up the narrow road which ran towards the tents, and, himself suddenly perceiv-

ing those guns now within easy distance, yet unfortunately covered, as it were, and sheltered by a group of tents, his foot lifted from the accelerator pedal for a few seconds, and he cast just one hurried glance at the Commander.

“Through ’em,” shouted the latter.

“Through ’em, yes, sir,” repeated the driver.

And through them he went, charging, despite the caution he had had only a few minutes earlier, over the ropes and pegs of the nearest tent, crashing a way between it and its neighbour, and once more sending the car into another avenue, at the end of which the guns could be seen in action. Then the machine-gun men on the car got busy, flames spat from the turret, and in a moment the scene was altered. Gun crews were swept out of existence in a few seconds—such is the power of machine-guns—and not another round was fired. By the time the car lumbered up beside the battery there was no one to oppose the crew, and only a number of Turks and a couple of Germans lay stretched behind the guns, wounded or killed, and powerless to interfere. Then, quick as lightning, the steel door opened, and three handy-men dashed out, rushed to the breeches of those guns, and with cunning, well-trained hands removed the breech actions. A minute or so later they were back, and the car was speeding again on its return journey.

Meanwhile that curious beast, that other naval



C 886

"THE MACHINE-GUN MEN ON THE CAR GOT BUSY."

armoured car which had run out on the left flank, nosing its way towards the enemy machine-gun, and flinging from its steel hide the bullets which that weapon now directed upon it, had got into position at the far end of the trench which sheltered it, and come to an abrupt halt there. It took perhaps half a minute for the crew to put their sights on the Turkish gunners, and then the same fate was dealt to them as had befallen the crews of the guns over amongst the tents. A hurried dash, shouts, and cheers of encouragement, and men of this armoured-car's crew returned with the machine-gun as a trophy.

By this time the cars in the centre had stampeded the Turkish battalion lying out in the open, and now, as the Commander's car came lolloping out from amongst the tents, a shrill whistle sounded from it, and promptly the men had their wheels full swing, and, circling their cars round whilst the Turks were still trying to recover from their consternation, swung them in line, headed on to the road, and so out towards the opening of the valley.

It had been a dashing affair. But what of Guy and his comrades?

CHAPTER XX

Ernst Blott

WE did not exaggerate when we described the action of that naval armoured-car detachment which had so boldly ventured into the Turkish camp. For experience of this huge war has taught that mechanical contrivances dominate the situation. Given guns in enormous numbers and of great size, and unlimited supplies of high-explosives and of missiles, and, providing the enemy is not so equipped, he can be driven backward, slaughtered, perhaps defeated. Who should know that point better than the British?

Yes, Britain had learned her lesson by bitter experience! That Expeditionary Force which she had so promptly sent to France, and which had made such a name for itself that its prowess will ring down the ages, had been equipped according to the ideas of the time; and that equipment, considered excellent then, no doubt, had at once been discovered to be hopelessly limited. The Expeditionary Force was out-gunned, swamped, by the enemy's preponderance of artillery; but, faced by an enormous pre-

ponderance of machine-guns, the gallant little force was never out-manceuvred; in spite of its relative paucity of weapons it held its face to the enemy, held him back, sobered down the first rush of the Germans, slowed it, extracted bitter toll of it for every mile of ground covered, and then, with its gallant French ally, turned, drove back hard in the face of the Prussians and hurled them over the Marne, and so to the Aisne.

The bitter need of armaments, more armaments, shells, and more shells, and still more shells, had been learned in that short yet desperate conflict; and the world knows, and history will repeat and din into the ears of those who follow us, how, holding the line of trenches in France, Britain set her workshops to the task of supplying our troops with material which would permit them to out-gun and out-shell the Germans, the task of manufacturing munitions and nothing but munitions.

Here, amongst the many items enumerated under the term munitions, were these armoured motor-cars—munitions of war—proved already to be extraordinarily useful, proved now, under this dashing Commander of the naval armoured-car detachment and his handymen to be a match for almost any numbers. Yet there is a limit to everything. A burst tyre on the second car, spokes shot from the wire wheel of another, rendering it somewhat fragile though still useful, re-

372 The Armoured-car Scouts

duced the pace and the powers of offensive of the detachment; and there was still that Turkish battalion to be considered, the one which had bolted for the exit from the valley.

"Don't like 'em a bit!" the Commander said aloud, though speaking to no one in particular, as they came near the exit. "Those beggars look as though they'd lined across the road, and—as I live, they've chucked stones and carts on it! Yes, stones and a couple of old carts!"

"Beg parding, sir," a voice shouted in his ear, though why the man shouted it was difficult to say, seeing that there was no reason; "ain't that another road just before you comes to 'em? Ain't one road just as good as another?"

"Where's it go, Mustapha?" demanded the officer, seeing a streak of yellow running off to the left.

"Due north, over that eminence yonder; steep, master—but——"

"Turn left! Ask No. 2 what pace he thinks he can get out of that burst tyre. Tell him to make ready to change the wheel at any moment. Go easy there, Abel! Slow and sure's our motto!"

Abel, that extraordinary, mysterious driver, actually did allow his eyelids to flicker just a little now, and even nodded.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he said, and slowed his car just a trifle. Then, coming to the bend, he steered off to

the left, and presently the whole detachment passed beyond that Turkish battalion, well within range of its rifles, though it did not open fire; while the handymen, receiving no orders, simply stood at their machine-guns and failed, much to their disgust, to take toll of the enemy.

Contemptuous of the shouts and howls which greeted this manœuvre, the detachment kept on along this road leading to the north, and presently clambered up the steep ascent which gave exit from the valley. Then the Commander's whistle went, and the cavalcade came to a halt.

"Change those two wheels!" was the order. "One of you men go along and see what's over the hill."

It took but a little time to change those wheels, and presently the cars were once more ready for the fray—for another brush with the enemy if need be. Not, let it be announced, that these naval fellows had come unscathed through such a sharp action, for that was hardly likely. To begin with, every car in the detachment showed signs of heavy usage; mudguards were shot through in many cases, and bore the deep dent of shrapnel bullets. The dull, grey, steel-clad cuticles were blurred and scarred, and even leaded here and there and everywhere; while one of the cars had had its armour cracked in one place—stove in some eight inches—where a direct hit had been made by a shell. That same direct hit, and the explosion

374 The Armoured-car Scouts

which followed it, had well-nigh blown the car over, and, tossing the crew to one side, had broken the thigh of one of the handy-men, who now lay on the bottom of the car, a rifle lashed to his legs, some morphia pellets under his tongue, and a black and curiously short clay pipe being got ready by a comrade who kneeled beside him puffing at it, so that when fully prepared his comrade might enjoy it also. Of other casualties there were three—one man shot through the shoulder, and his arm now in a sling; a second with one ear slightly damaged, a fact which was excessively annoying, and which was exercising his mind tremendously, for this man rather fancied his own particular cast of beauty. The third was even more severe; indeed, it was doubtful whether the handy-man would survive, seeing that he had been shot through the forehead, though wounds of that description have proved far from fatal on scores of occasions in this war of nations.

It was not the wounds, nor the temporary patching of them, that now attracted the attention of the Commander, though he was solicitous always for the comfort, well-being, and safety of his men; it was the antics of the individual sent forward to the top of the hill. The fellow was standing there just below the sky-line, kicking his heels about, jumping from side to side, and semaphoring with his arms at clock-work speed.

"What's he saying?" demanded the Commander, putting his glasses on him. "What's that, Signaller?"

"Says 'Come up! Come up!' says 'come up!' sir," replied that worthy. "'Come up quick! come up!' repeats it always."

The whistle went again, the cars got into motion, and in the space of a few minutes had done precisely as the man had requested—had come up and joined him.

"There's the deuce of a bobbery going on down below there, sir," shouted the man, breathless with excitement and with his exertions. "Blest if there isn't another action; though what it's about and who's in it I don't know."

"Come aboard," the Commander ordered. "Get ahead there, we've got to go on whatever happens, for to return is out of the question. If it's a bobbery, well, we're out for bobberies—eh?" he asked, appealing to the fellow.

Whereat the man grinned, and every man of the crew joined in eagerly. Presently the leading car swept over the hill and dived down into the neighbouring valley, a wide-flung open space, much the same as that which they had only just quitted, and there they found, indeed, that there was quite a lively little affair in progress. Somewhere on their left, not far from the road, hidden no doubt from those who

opposed them, were three fellows in Turkish garb firing furiously at another group, visible like the first to the Commander and his men high up above them. That other group comprised perhaps four men—per-more, perhaps less. A saddled horse and a cart sheltered behind another group of boulders, from which the flashes of rifles came, answering the shots of those three Turks down below.

“Domestic?” asked the Commander, his brows elevated at this occurrence. “A ruction in the Turkish camp itself? That ain’t our business!”

“Perhaps it’s another massacre, sir,” suggested the imperturbable Abel, opening his lips for the very first time to address the officer, except when he had lisped “Aye, aye, sir” to the Commander’s orders.

“Another massacre be hanged!” he got in answer. “For massacres, my friend, you want a mass of people! Ha, ha! Sounds almost like a pun, don’t it? Let me tell you, a massacre’s a murdering of a host of individuals. Three ain’t a host; nothing like the sort of host that we’ve just had a scrap with. No, I call it a domestic ruction. We’ll leave ’em to it. Shut your ports, lads; signal to the other boys to do likewise, and let’s sail on. It’s not our affair if Turk kills Turk.”

“It ain’t Turk,” suddenly shouted that huge machine-gunner in the turret, who had, in fact, the best point of view of any of the crew, and whose

stentorian voice was never lowered. Even when he whispered it was a dull, booming sort of growl, which penetrated to every corner. "It ain't no blinkin' Turks, sir," he bellowed, "leastwise, not the three down immediately below us. Sink me! if one of 'em ain't signallin', semaphorin', a little chap what's a-dancin' about like as though he was on hot tin-tacks."

"Semaphoring? Tin-tacks? Not blinking Turks? repeated the officer, unconsciously repeating the same slang expressions as the man. "But, then, who? Why? Well, I'm jiggered! The fellow is semaphoring, signalling. What?"

But the signaller got there long before his officer, for he had had his eye glued upon that little fellow down below from the very moment when the huge machine-gunner had pointed him out.

"He's a-sayin' 'British! British! British!' all the time, sir!" he said. "And now he's a-sayin' 'your pals—Jo, Guy, and'—I don't make that out, sir."

"You don't make that out," exclaimed the officer, now quite interested and excited. "Bless you for a duffer! Jo and Guy. Why, those are the two men we sent off on that reconnaissance; and, of course, that Russian officer, Nicholas."

"Aye, aye, sir! Nicholas it is! I've got it now! I've got his message!" called the signaller.

There was no need to give an order after that—no

need even to tap that exemplary and frigid driver on the shoulder, nor for the Commander to open his lips. He merely nodded, and pushed his pugnacious head forward in a manner which showed his wishes to all concerned. As for Abel, the driver, his head, too, was craned forward at a sharp angle, his eyes riveted through the steel slit in front upon that agile, dancing figure down below behind the boulders—that figure semaphoring to them. Unconsciously, it seemed, his hand slid to his levers, the gears clapped home and the car rolled forward, and, gathering speed while the engine flicked and snapped at the gears, it shot over the course, gathered still further speed, and soared downwards, kicking dust and grit away from its wheels.

“Says: ‘Don’t be in a hurry!’ Says: ‘All O.K.!’ Says—no he don’t; broken off, sir,” repeated the signaller, while all hands, with their eyes fixed upon their comrades down below—for now all were sure that it was the incorrigible Jo who was signalling to them—saw that active little fellow bounce away to join the two figures near him, watched as he seized a rifle, and then saw flames flash from the muzzle.

It would appear, too, that those other figures behind the boulders on the far side of the road had now caught sight of the intruders of the armoured-car detachment now tearing down towards them. There was a sudden commotion there. One of the figures

stood upright, shielded his eyes from the glancing sun, scowled, and cursed loudly, and then snatched at his helmet, which was suddenly lifted from his head as a bullet from over the way perforated it. Then he shouted at the man near him, drove him out from behind the rocky cover, and ordered him to mount the cart, while he himself, picking up the reins of his horse, swung himself into the saddle, and, digging spurs into the beast, set him off across country, keeping the rocks between himself and the rifles of those three brown figures.

Need we state that it was Ernst Blott, the German officer, that scoundrel who had murdered Guy's father, had robbed him of every penny. Sitting close down in his saddle he galloped off—for, whatever he was, he was a fine horseman, and, to do him only justice, a good example of German military training. For he was an excellent officer, speaking of officers as developed by the Prussian school—that is to say, he knew his work, knew how to command soldiers, could manœuvre them in the field and in camp, was a strict disciplinarian, and when it came to fighting did not hesitate to take his own risks in the action. For the rest, he was what many a Prussian officer was when this Armageddon began, what a few no doubt are at this moment when we write, what few will be when Great Britain and her valiant Allies have taught them the lesson that they have wanted. When Germany is

380 The Armoured-car Scouts

beaten to the ground, when the Power which organized war for the sake of conquest—so that she might become the ruler of the world—when this national assassin, having failed in her first rush, having ignominiously failed to take advantage of her forty years of secret preparation, is finally beaten, and the bitterness of defeat has bitten into her soul, then we trow there will be few of the old type of Prussian officers, of those arrogant, swaggering persons who browbeat the men under their command, and who looked down upon all civilians, and conducted themselves as the elect lords of creation.

We have done Ernst Blott but justice when we have described him as a good soldier and leader in legitimate enterprises, an arrogant, swaggering, scheming assassin in other affairs of life. But we must fain raise some excuse for him. The man had been trained in the Prussian school, and there obtained his military efficiency. He had been sent out to Russia as a German agent to propagate German ideas and snatch commercial advantages for the Fatherland; and, to equip him for that all-important task, he had been taught that subterfuge, unscrupulous negotiations, lying, cheating, anything was excusable so long as the end was accomplished. What wonder, then, that with such precepts laid down by those who had trained him for his task, the man employed every species of underhand behaviour in seek-

ing his own private fortune while seeking also the advance of his country? What if he had made friends with an Englishman only to murder him and rob him in the end? It was part of the game—part of the German game! For in advancing his own fortune had he not advanced also that of Germany, seeing that he had enriched one of the nation?

Pah! the tale is told! That was Germany and the Germans when the war commenced! How long will it take Great Britain and her Allies to teach that arrogant nation that honesty, uprightness, and truthfulness are greater assets than those displayed by the Kaiser's people?

Thrusting spurs into the sweating flanks of his horse, Ernst Blott went off across country at a speed which rapidly took him out of range of the rifles held by Guy and Nicholas and Jo, and seemed, indeed, to be well on his way to safety. But no! The horse stumbled. A deep nullah cut across the path of the fugitive, and just as the brakes began to grip the wheels of the leading armoured car, and shouts and sharp cat-calls and wild signals were passed from its crew, and the crews of the following cars, to those three dancing figures behind the boulders, the horse fell. Ernst Blott was shot out of the saddle, and the Commander, then watching him through his glasses—now possible, as the car had come to a standstill—saw the German crash into the far end of a nullah,

rest there a moment, and then fall backwards—an inert, crumpled heap, unconscious, no doubt, perhaps killed, certainly put out of action. As for the cart and the man who drove it, the fellow had sense enough to sit where he was, his hands held in the air, and remained there till one of the handy-men ordered him off his seat, while another gripped the head of the horse.

“What’s this? What’s all this bobbery about?” demanded the Commander when he was able to push his way into the circle of grinning tars who now surrounded these three, presumably Turkish soldiers, from beneath whose helmets beamed the faces of those three who had encountered so many adventures during their reconnaissance behind the Turkish lines. “You three, you rascals, what’s it mean? You, Jo, you tell me?”

And Jo spluttered out an explanation.

“It’s like this ’ere, sir; we three, as you see before you, got right up against it! There were massacres taking place, and we had to lend a hand to those wretched Armenian people. Then we sheered off, up-anchored, and got going, only to get chased by some of the Turks. They rounded us up that night, hauled us off to prison, and well—no——”

“You go on!” said the Commander, pointing at Guy.

“It was rather unfortunate, sir,” said the latter,

"on the staff of the general of the division which had made us prisoners there was a German."

"Hum!" sniffed the Commander, while various exclamations, not all too polite, burst from the tars about them.

"Named Ernst Blott. He'd been a partner of my father's. He'd murdered him and stolen all his belongings."

"Same tale!" exclaimed the officer crisply, with a twist of his lips. "German 'frightfulness'! Go on."

"He spotted me, of course. I suppose he immediately recollected that some day I might track him down, and so made up his mind to finish with me. I was condemned as a spy, that's all."

"It isn't all," burst in Nicholas. "We've had the most frightful job to get away. We were separated. Jo and I broke out of our prison and went to find Guy, and, instead of finding him in his tent, we found the sentry tied up and muzzled. But we all forgathered by the merest chance, stole some Turkish uniforms, and trekked out of the camp. We'd just got to this spot when that German bully came over the hill and held us up. My goodness, what luck it is that you've come along!"

There was greater luck in the event than either of them anticipated at the moment, and it was not until they had investigated matters a little further and had

384 The Armoured-car Scouts

overhauled the cart that Guy learned really how great his fortune had been. For there, hidden in a leather bag, was the greater part of the bonds and gold which Ernst Blott had stolen from his father—money no longer required by that rascal, seeing that he lay dead in the bottom of the nullah.

There is little more to tell of this naval armoured-car detachment and its gallant crews. They saw much service in the Caucasus, returned to the Russian front near Galicia, and, as we write, are doing valiant service in the Roumanian retreat. But men cannot fight always. The soldier needs relaxation like any other individual, and Guy, since that adventure of his down in Lower Armenia, has found opportunity on two occasions to return on leave to England to visit his aunt and uncle. Naturally enough, too, his visits have entailed his seeing much of that very charming cousin whom he was so fortunate as to rescue in the North Sea.

We do not know for sure, but we venture now to issue our information in the form of one of our nautical *communiqués*. We are not sure, we say, but, well, it seems that there is a decided "liveliness" in that direction.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
At the Villafield Press, Glasgow, Scotland

Princeton University Library



32101 066120500

